

by René Béhaine

THE SURVIVORS

"A novelist of the most exquisite and precise talent, a novelist whose work anyone with a liking for irony and detachment would be certain to enjoy."—Howard Spring in *The Evening Standard*

SECOND IMPRESSION

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HISTORY OF A SOCIETY

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THE
CONQUEST
OF LIFE

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RENÉ BÉHAINE

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TRANSLATED BY

EDWARD CRANKSHAW



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WOKING

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The Survivors, recently published in this country after a lapse of a quarter of a century, may be regarded as an introduction to the art of Monsieur Béhaine. This art was immediately recognized, and it was at once clear to the majority of critics that in this book, published in France in 1914, was the work of a great novelist too long neglected by England, to her loss.

That volume dealt with the ancestry and childhood of Catherine de Laignes, supplying the first glimpse of the heroine of Monsieur Béhaine's immense series of novels called generically *The History of a Society*. In effect it was the rendering of decline in an aristocratic family. But this volume had its counterpart, which, it is hoped, may also one day be translated, in *Les Nouveaux Venus*, which dealt with the ancestry and childhood of Michel Varambaud and was, in effect, the rendering of the rise of a family of small bourgeois. Michel Varambaud is Monsieur Béhaine's hero, and readers of *The Survivors* will remember the unheralded appearance in its closing pages of a slightly uncouth, "difficult," and enigmatic schoolboy. They will remember particularly the concluding paragraph, where Michel is "fixed," as it were, in the very last words of the book: he is seen leaning

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against a door at Catherine's party, dressed as a harlequin, motionless, "watching the glittering whirlpool of oddly assorted pairs as they passed and repassed before him, with mocking, tender, timid eyes."

There follows a shorter volume, *Si jeunesse savait . . .*, and this deals with the first beginnings of Michel's adolescent love for Catherine. It begins as a seaside-holiday affair; it might have ended at that, for Madame de Laignes, getting wind of the situation, announces its impossibility to Madame Varambaud, and Michel is accordingly sent away—to his grandmother, Madame Armelle, at Thisy. But it does not end there, for Michel, young, passionate, and harshly exacting, is in deadly earnest, and Catherine, too, several years his senior, is in love. The present volume, a presentation of the first major phase of their love, begins immediately after this forced separation.

Thus, if in *The Survivors* we have our introduction to the art of Monsieur Béhaine, in *The Conquest of Life* we have our introduction to the private human drama which binds his immense work. And the main feature of this introduction is the painful dilemma of Catherine, not a strong character, who, in the words of Mr. Ford Madox Ford, "finds herself between the immovable cliff of her parents' opposition and the irresistible harsh passion of her suitor, Michel Varambaud, so that she has as it were two consciences, each diametrically opposed to the other."

Ideally there should be no gaps in this English

presentation of a great French work. But there are difficulties. And indeed, when we have given a distinguished foreign writer twenty-five years' start, that writer still living and writing very much in his prime, there are arguments against dawdling over his earliest work. This volume has its place in the history of that epoch of French society which falls between the day of our grandparents and the present day. It is a complete fragment in itself. If we cannot have all the volumes of the series in the order in which they first appeared we can at least choose those most representative of the author; the general sense is not spoilt or obscured by any intervals between the selected volumes. New relations are continually being established in our lives, and we do not always know the whole past of the people we meet: we learn to know them by a gesture, an incident, an allusion, and our partial ignorance does not diminish our interest in them. So it is with *The History of a Society*. It would be another matter if Monsieur Béhaine were a purveyor of romantic intrigues; but he is not. Each book is a fragment of the life of an epoch seen through and by the experience of an individual—here Michel Varambaud.

Just as in *The Survivors* we had, now in the background now the foreground, the sad historical motive of the crumbling of an ancient order, so in *The Conquest of Life* we have the actuality of the years it covers. "Later on," again to quote Mr. Ford's preface to the earlier book, "Later on, when he comes to deal with that

most disastrous of all disasters befalling France, whose disruptive effects are not even yet exhausted, you will have him rendering, through the eyes of Michel, a far more loud historic note. And with such verisimilitude that this reader at least who passed much of his youth in the Paris of the *Affaire* can vouch for the fact that in it Monsieur Béhaine brings to life again the crowds in the night, the shafts of light in the darkened boulevards, the innumerable cries, the very feel of the damp night air on the face of that half-century ago. For the Dreyfus Case seems always to have been transacted in a sort of darkness."

All that occurs in this volume, but its real affair, as of all the dozen volumes of this History, is the affair of Catherine and Michel. Although it extends beyond the covers of this book, both forwards and backwards, it has here a beginning and an end: the story of the book is the story of a distinct phase in their relations, complete in itself, with its own beginnings, its own drama, its own climax, regardless of what comes after.

The Conquest of Life, it will be seen, does not give a picture of today's preoccupations. It touches an age, a pre-War age, when marriageable girls in France were truly without liberty or sexual knowledge and were reduced, in the author's phrase, to a state of "animal submission." Michel's conduct and preoccupations are highly untypical and "advanced." His character speaks for itself. It is youth, high-principled, idealistic, exacting and inevitably priggish (though it should be remem-

bered that priggishness is an exclusively English conception), in revolt against the shams of an arranged world and the mortification of the spirit of humanity. Poor Catherine's character, far less determinate, is also lucid enough; but readers of *The Survivors* will remember her education. . . . Here, then, is a time that has passed, but from which our own age was born.

The plan of *The Survivors* and *Les Nouveaux Venus* was to portray, somewhat from the outside, a given society. "A society of extreme mediocrity," Monsieur Béhaine himself has called it, "living by habit and on, so to speak, inherited vitality." But gradually this History of a Society grows in interest and immediacy, deepening into a philosophical work which touches on all the problems of the day: war, patriotism, sexual life, the Jewish question, democracy, and so on. We have, thus, not a novel in the usual sense of the word, but the fragment of an epoch. Thus, too, no single volume can be completely representative of the author's genius; for this genius lies, precisely, in deliberate, ordered and immense accumulation and progression, clarified by unerring selection. Few, I think, who have already saluted Monsieur Béhaine's consummate rendering of externals and of a more or less generalized mode of existence would expect the same pen to show the no less consummate mastery in analysis which this volume offers.

"A traveller arrives in an unknown country. He sees what lies before his eyes, streets, people, glimpses of

interiors. In time he becomes interested in the thoughts of the people he watches; and at last he makes the acquaintance of the most distinctive personalities, and with them approaches the most important and the profoundest problems of the land." With this image Monsieur Béhaine himself conveys the character of his work. With *The Conquest of Life* we cease to be mere wondering onlookers.

EDWARD CRANKSHAW

I

CATHERINE'S FIRST LETTER, which Michel received two days after his arrival at Thisy, was full of the sudden, exaggerated despair that she had shown during their last week together at Saint-Guénolé. And with her who had remained behind he lived over again the hours before his departure and the hours that had followed it.

She described her awakening in the dawn to hear his carriage wheels, told of the tears she had shed, the irremediable sense of abandonment and helplessness that had overwhelmed her. How long the afternoon had seemed! After lunch she had gone out (they no longer watched her now!) for a walk over the cliffs; and never, never had she experienced such a sense of universal sadness. The sky was overcast; it was dull and cold, and she herself alone, utterly alone, thinking how far away he was already, even now, and how each turn of the wheels was taking him farther still—now, as she wrote, she was home again, and evening was coming on. Alas! it was only a few hours since he had gone, and the slow passing of those hours brought home to her more and more the cruelty of his absence. She felt that at any moment

she must wake and find that it had all been a bad dream, that he was still really there, that soon she would see him open the door and come in. But no, it was not a dream: the separation was real! Oh, what would become of her without him? How would she find the strength to live? If she could only sleep those two years away, ceasing to think, ceasing to live, until she should wake in his arms!

"Tonight," she went on, "you will be at Thisy. You are going to work, you are going to work well; and if sometimes when you let your thoughts turn to me you wonder, 'what is she doing now, what is she thinking of now?', then you can always say, 'she is thinking of me: she loves me; in me are centred all her thoughts, all her dreams and her desires.'"

Passing swiftly over that evocation of what was for him a past already distant, a past, moreover, he could have wished more distant still, Michel, dazzled by the love spread before him, drank deeply in his sorrow of these words: two days old as they were, they were not yet dead, like the rest; they lived; they belonged to the very moment of his reading them. Far away as she was, he could hear her speaking them now. In his imagination he followed her along the high cliff road where she had walked so wretchedly on the afternoon of his going; and he saw her thus, day succeeding monotonous day, abandoned openly to her grief, like himself, and inhabiting a solitude which now at last she dared court.

But in her next letter, and thereafter, that heart which for one moment he had thought fixed for ever on the level of his own, showed traces of uneasiness; and, if her grief at their separation was no less acute than before, she no longer knew whole days of misery now, but only hours. She described all the various amusements with which she filled her days as though they were distractions deliberately undertaken: she bicycled; she played tennis; she even went shooting. She wrote, too, of the people she met every day. It was as if, in his absence, she could no longer bear to contemplate the horrors of reality beneath the surface of life, horrors which Michel had shown her for her own protection, tearing away that veil of ignorance encouraged by a world that profits by it; and already she was forgetting the ideas they had worked out together, already she asked no more than to be deceived.

Some of the young people she met were undeniably intelligent. They were kind to her too, and their friendliness delighted her. One of them, a certain Georges Raymond, might even have gone far, she thought. He interested her because she fancied she might have thought Michel very much like him if they had not happened to be in love. He was of the same type as Michel, but less intelligent, and also, she felt, less warm-hearted—but, of course, she deplored (quite forgetting all Michel had ever said), spoilt, like everyone else, by loose living, so that all the good in him was lost.

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A full-stop—and once again she poured out her love and despair. He, Michel, was a part of her very life. She wrapped him round with caresses, hiding from herself with these tender effusions the frightened shrinking of her soul. And just as two straight lines draw closer and closer together in perspective until finally they seem to be one, so she went from one dream to another until all was mingled in an indeterminate future, and with no effort or trouble at all the point was reached when at last she should be all to him. Oh, the long arrears of kisses and caresses they would have to make up for then! They would need whole days and whole nights (and especially the nights) if every hour of suffering was to be rewarded with an hour of happiness. And the joy and longing with which she thought of their life together. . . . Yet the more she said she loved him the wider appeared to Michel the gulf between reality, the uncertain present, and her words. Sad at the thought both of what she herself was losing and of what she was making him lose, he felt his distrust slowly deepening into irritation, and this in turn was increased by his powerlessness to answer her or reproach her to her face—just as we may think of a runaway child with as much exasperation as tenderness when we consider the danger in which its disobedience has again placed it.

He replied with bitter derision, hurt by the hurt he was doing her, yet wishing to hurt her for forcing him to blaspheme when he wanted only to adore

unreservedly. To that she returned a long cry of indignation and anger, full of the resentment of an outraged heart and a wounded self-esteem. Far from admitting her fault or the fact that her life was at odds with her dreams and that her dreams were blinding her to life, she considered herself wronged: she, now, turned accuser. And without answering his reproaches, much less seeking to evade them, she bared herself to his blows, with her own hands sought to enlarge the wound, and delighted in her suffering as though it justified her in everything she did. Yet in the very next breath revolted pride made her deny this very suffering; and, now flaunting it, now thus seeking to conceal it, she brought into play all the weapons at her disposal in her efforts to wound him, pretending all the while merely to be pointing out his errors.

Irony was succeeded by sarcasm, and a cruel and unfair thrust gave way to laboured disingenuousness. He had implored her to be gay, she declared; she had obeyed him; and now he blamed her for it. And wilfully misunderstanding his objections she tried to catch him in a dilemma. Did he or did he not love her? For if he loved her he should have confidence in her; if he had not confidence in her he could not love her. And she went on to say that if by a certain date she did not hear from him she would know just what to think; she would understand. There could be no more explanations. If he no longer loved her—very well: they must separate. She would spare him her

thoughts on the subject lest in opening her heart to him she should have the misfortune to stumble on one of those phrases he had criticized in her letter.

Then, realizing the possible consequences of what she was urging upon him, and forestalling him with a supreme convulsion of self-esteem (and never for a moment imagining that she could fail to compare favourably with anybody coming after her), she gave him a bit of advice: to do as others did, "since," she said, "they say it is such fun," and devote himself to pleasure and forget her. Then he would see whether other girls had more or less freedom than she had, and see too whether they could love better.

She concluded thus:

"Well, this is probably my last letter to you. My pride, although I have striven to repress it, is stronger than my love and will no longer be silent. Good-bye! I remain your friend in spite of everything, to clasp your hand and wish you success in everything you do."

All this Michel read in a kind of shrivelled wonderment, as if some one else had written the words, revealing a heart quite alien to him. But at this last outrage, in a spasm of indignation bordering on disgust, he tore the letter across. In the next instant, however, forgetting his own feelings and remembering only the rôle he had assumed in relation to her, he forced himself to regain his composure. Without in the least abating his anger he felt nevertheless that beneath

this hostility of hers, and in spite of its defiant exaggeration, there might well be a basis of truth—firmer, perhaps, than she herself realized. He had asked something of her—and at once, without remorse, she was abandoning him! . . . But this thought, far from casting him down, gave him fresh courage. Since he loved her, it was precisely because she had need of him that he must go to her aid, and, at a moment when she showed herself so unwise, prove himself wise enough for two. For did not love have its duties as well as its delights? Forgiveness was the best, as it was also the hardest, service he could render her, and happiness was not the end but the result of love. Patiently, then, and as gently as he might have spoken to a sick friend, he set about the business of restoring to itself this soul which had strayed; tenderly, thinking less of the wrong done him than of the good he might do, and, in his ardour to prove his love, quite forgetting to upbraid her for her falsity.

Five days later her answer came, and from the very first words Michel saw that she was his again. But if love, this once, had triumphed over pride, it was clear from the forgiveness which, before beginning to reproach herself, she accorded him with fitting generosity, that pride was driving her to seek a last superiority; and if she spoke of her own remorse it was only after being tenderly overwhelmed by the remorse she visualized in him. Oh, his good, his gentle

letter! How wonderfully it had redeemed that other! At last she had found him again, the real Michel. And this letter, which she had scarcely dared hope for after behaving so badly—yes, she also!—had really come . . . and just as she had dreamed it might be, as trusting, as tender, as tearful, as full of love and contrition. But did he realize that she too needed pardon? She only wished—oh, how she wished!—she could have him with her to ask his forgiveness for what she had done, to lean her head upon his shoulder and to weep afresh, so close to him, the tears she had shed after writing that wicked letter. Her sole excuse was that she had suffered so dreadfully through his refusal to believe in the sincerity of her sufferings: that torturing grief had driven her to wickedness; and it had been in its shadow that she had written as she had. But once the letter had been posted, once she had truly realized that nothing now could stop it reaching him, she had been utterly overcome with anguish at having knowingly wronged him; and the certainty of the pain the letter would bring him had almost driven her mad. Oh, those intolerable lonely walks—wandering at random along the streets, seeking solitude yet fleeing it for fear of her own thoughts! He would never forgive her, she had told herself; she would never hear from him again. And then that supreme moment of hope as she stood at the post-office counter while the woman rummaged in the rack. Would there be one for her? . . .

At last—and there was! She had made her escape, slipping the letter beneath her blouse, still not knowing what it might contain. But at least she had something of him, now—his forgiveness, perhaps—or perhaps only the farewell that would make an end of everything. . . . And to Michel it was plain that she had written these words without the least realization that she was repeating words used before in anger; and once again he saw that, for her, their love was at the mercy of a word.

Into the midst of this drama (which she was far from suspecting, although it was being played out at her side), came Madame Armelle with a cheerful reminder that examinations were drawing near and that Michel really ought to start working seriously; better still, she suggested, let his old grandmother hear him in what he had already learnt! To combat what she took to be his laziness she blandly agreed (though her eyes, which sparkled with delight, belied her) that what he had to learn was boring in the extreme; but she tried to make him see the boredom of the moment as no more than a bitter little pill which is much best swallowed at once to get it over—coaxing him just as she had done in the days when he was very small, and in almost identical words:

“Come now!” she exclaimed. “Be a brave boy! Let’s see if we can’t get as far as the Peace of Nimègue today.”

But every day he grew more clearly conscious of the discrepancy between the goal pursued and the means he brought to his pursuit of it. He felt he would never get his baccalaureate; he felt he did not even want to any more. And for the first time he became vaguely aware that this narrow and well-trodden path was not the only approach and that the same destination might be reached by other ways; he seemed to see before him a limitless expanse, a solitude in which no path as yet was traced, which filled him as he gazed at it with mingled longing and foreboding.

He would put down his book, wander out into the garden, come in again; then, in unconscious search for guidance, or in the desire to share at least in imagination in that life from which he was cut off and which he could only find fiction, he would take down a book at random. One evening in this way he came across Renan's *Life of Jesus*.

He started reading it and was at first astonished and distrustful. Instead of the Jesus of the history books, who moved in the realm of the supernatural, there slowly took shape from page to page a different Jesus, a real figure, living and having his being in a recognizable society in which he played his part. Michel saw him in the poor house at Nazareth where he was born, not an isolated figure any more, but one of a family with a father and mother, the eldest of several brothers and sisters all growing up together. He took part in their games, and like them went to the

little village school; his father died, his sisters married, and, for some years, lapped about in his own secret dream, he worked obscurely at his father's trade. This was the humble reality that replaced the legend; but Michel found it incredible precisely because it was so easy to believe. Could the problem which had tormented him so long really have so simple a solution? He was as troubled by the truth as he had been by the lie, though for reasons exactly opposed, and his mind relapsed into its old uncertainty.

But as he read on his indecision slowly yielded to a strengthening conviction, until suddenly, no longer able to withstand the evidence, he was filled with an overwhelming sense of truth. It was as though the whole universe had reeled. And through his first stupefied amazement he felt towards the parents who, instead of guiding him, had deceived him, that same resentful anger which had overcome him in the days of his childhood when he had discovered that the Infant Jesus did not really come down the chimney on Christmas Eve. Why had they lied to him? What could be the reason for inventing such a hotch-potch of oddities and absurdities? Remembering all his vain attempts to bend his reason to things against which it had rebelled, he could not but laugh at himself and reflect with bitter irony on all the time he had wasted. But if he now saw that hitherto he had peopled infinity with lies, now infinity seemed empty, with a new and horrible emptiness which could not be filled by any-

thing.—He had put out his lamp, and lying motionless on his back he stared up into the blackness with wide open eyes, his spirit still quivering, as the muscles will quiver after some tremendous effort. The immensity of this darkness! The silence! He felt abandoned and lost, no more than a pin-point in space. Too feeble to bear in its terrible nakedness this revelation of man's mysterious destiny, not daring even to hope for fear of being mistaken once again, he asked himself if at the end of all things there really was nothing—as a child with a cruel mother may doubt the very existence of maternal love until one day it discovers that there are mothers who do indeed love their children.

September came to an end, and in Catherine's letters now all the talk was of her next visit to Paris and of their chances of meeting each other. For a long time she bombarded Michel with her plans, her fears, her hopes, untiringly repeating that she loved him, and delighting in the one thought of his lips with a passion that was only equalled by her lively sense of prudence and dissimulation. Thus for a moment she would dream of meeting him at night, in her hotel: with her mother safely asleep in the next room, she would open her door to him and they would be able to have an hour or two together. Similarly she had suggested that he should go back to Thisy, whence he could secretly return again to Paris unknown to anyone; he could keep watch in the street outside

her hotel, and if she came out alone he could join her. But perhaps, after all, she concluded, it would be best to use this short stay in Paris to mislead her mother completely, so that she might think him quite recovered from his infatuation and thus be more easily persuaded to let Catherine come up again during the winter. It could be taken as certain that she, Catherine, and her mother would be calling on Monsieur and Madame Varambaud, and this would give him his opportunity to make it seem that he was in the best of spirits and bent only on his pleasures—or at any rate, if he preferred that, not to look stricken, not to go about like someone with a secret sorrow! Her mother, who only asked to be persuaded that all was over between them, would be only too pleased to believe that what she desired had come to pass.

But to lend himself to this kind of deception seemed to Michel tantamount to disavowal of their love, and in this tendency towards the equivocal, so unexpected after her open declaration of her desire to marry him, which was still not yet a month old, he saw with misgiving an inexplicable backward step, a confused impulse to employ a weapon which if necessary could be turned against himself. Back in Paris again with his parents, who had just returned, he learned one day that she was arriving that very evening at the Gare Montparnasse by the first night train, and instantly determined to go to meet her—

as much with the idea of forcing her to come to a decision in her mother's presence as urged by an imperious desire to provoke explanations which should clear her.

As he walked up the rue de Rennes (it was nearly eleven o'clock and there were very few people about; the station clock in the distance was a large, luminous disc apparently resting on the deserted street), his injuries came crowding irresistibly back to mind: and as dispersed troops reassemble for the battle, so there surged up before him, completely blocking Catherine's image, the solid phalanx of those questions that for weeks past he had been finding unanswerable. So obsessed was he with his own impotence to solve them that he regarded their imminent reunion simply as a chance to seek enlightenment. But alas, wasn't the answer to all these riddles the same? Had she not always and invariably, for all her assurances of love, behaved simply as though she did not love him? He remembered with undiminished grief that letter in which she wrote that she had been expecting the final word from him. She had met his reproaches with silence and never attempted to answer them, any more than she had explained her refusal a little later when, in the first flush of his emotion, he had begged her to read the *Life of Jesus*. She had merely remarked drily that she preferred not to lose a comfortable illusion, revealing yet once again her capacity for accepting the false when it was profitable, or less trouble,

or generally more pleasant to do so. What, then, did this love amount to—a love so different from his, a love which she swore was perfect? How, in spite of all her affirmations and her vows, could their hearts be one if their souls were divided? And suddenly, at the thought of how short a time they would have for discussing questions of such gravity, he felt himself swept away by a kind of feverish over-excitement which scattered all coherent thought. Would he even have time to talk to her at all? He would have to make haste indeed if in those few moments together he was to say all that he had in mind, concisely and with precision; to urge her, refute her, force her to reply. But the more he struggled to order his thoughts the more they scattered, and the words he sought escaped him. Over and over again, as though learning a lesson by heart and with the ever-increasing terror of feeling that it might suddenly all go, he repeated: "What made you write, 'I was expecting the final word from you'? Why won't you read Renan?"—But always between these two questions, separating them, confusing them, making him forget the one even as he phrased the other, there surged a confused muddle of images and ideas: plans and reflections, advice to be asked or offered, arguments and retrospective reproaches harking back to long past discussions—everything, indeed, that had been seething in him during their separation—as if the burden of thought, grief and love was too heavy for him to

bear alone and must be shared if he was to go on living.

The last pantings of the engine were still drowning the clamour and hurrying footsteps of the crowd of travellers when Michel greeted Madame de Laignes and, before she had recovered from her astonishment, whisked Catherine off to the exit under the pretext of helping her find a cab. The ramp curved sharply down from the level of the station, and under the arcade there they paused: without a word he clasped her to him, kissing her passionately; and through the delicate harshness of her veil, that tasted dusty beneath his lips, he felt the living warmth and perfume of her skin. But she straightened herself, and with a voluptuous and tender gravity drew aside the little obstacle: their naked mouths touched, and all the anxiety she had felt at seeing him waiting there was dissolved in the softness of their mutual kiss.

Drawing apart once more they gazed at each other. And then, without the slightest warning—wrenching himself violently from the languor which already threatened to submerge him, unconscious of himself, conscious only of what he meant to say—he burst out:

“Why did you say you wouldn’t read the *Life of Jesus*?”

Astonished less at the unexpected question than at the tone in which it was delivered, for its intensity

seemed out of all proportion, Catherine was for a moment at a loss. But immediately, without stopping to think, her fertile and evasive mind supplied her with the explanation, the necessary excuse: if she had not read it it was simply because she had not been able to get hold of a copy at Saint-Guénolé; but, since he was so insistent, she would promise to read it as soon as she returned to Saint-Loup. Scarcely, however, was she feeling safe again when, by a transition she could not follow, out came the second question; then, before she could reply, came a spate of inferred accusations and reproaches. And all the while he was pouring out these recriminations, longing only to be persuaded of their baselessness, his sense of the pitifully short time allowed him, his own emotion, and his terror of her replies gave his words a sort of clipped and feverish abruptness that disconcerted and alienated her: he had, it seemed, just come to make a scene!

For all that, she replied by protesting her love. But he felt the change in her. Indeed, afraid as she was of what her mother might be thinking, first of Michel's unexpected appearance and then of their protracted absence, her only idea now was to get away from him as quickly as she could, and she kept an anxious eye on the whirligig of traffic in the road. Now and again, while listening to him abstractedly, she would turn or interrupt her own brief replies to signal to a passing cabby; occasionally she even

called out—until at last, losing all patience, she plunged into the stream. She hurried along so breathlessly that Michel, following in her wake and trying to keep pace with her, had rather the appearance of pursuing than of accompanying her. And he realized with despair that in the confusion he was forgetting half the things he had promised himself should be said and that he knew now he would remember only when she had gone.

At last they picked up an open carriage; they got in together, and Catherine's distress immediately vanished. She turned to Michel and held out her hand; he clasped it feverishly in his. The driver whipped up his horses and they moved off, the fresh damp air blowing softly in their faces as together they breathed its sharp and satisfying savour: they might have been setting off for a drive, and for them it could not have lasted too long; but their drive was no further than the yard or two to the pavement.

IT WAS A WEAKNESS of Madame de Laignes' character that, for all her bustling exterior and her air of assurance, she invariably left to chance the ordering of her affairs, and therefore inconsequently accepted the Varambauds' invitation to dinner for the day after her arrival in Paris. Thus although Catherine had asserted as she and Michel parted at the station that it would be absolutely impossible for them to meet during the day, she was able to remind him that at least they would be seeing each other in the evening; she would, what was more, do her very best to arrive ahead of her mother, and she begged him at all costs to be at home from five o'clock onwards.

By the midday post there came a letter from her. It was quite unexpected, and he leapt to the conclusion that at the last moment she must have been able to contrive a meeting somewhere. What then was his disappointment to find nothing but the old counsels of discretion, the old delight in dissimulation, which he had thought she had at last renounced, but to which, as witnessed her insistence and her precipitancy in writing, she still clung with undiminished stubbornness. Instead of openly discussing the present situation

she begged him this once to do as she asked, blindly, even if it did seem strange to him; and to disarm his resistance and coax him to give in she appealed to his confidence in her.

"Believe me," she wrote finally, "I am asking a proof of your love, and perhaps not the least proof either. I talked to your mother a lot about us before we left Saint-Guénolé, and she thinks as I do that all we can do now is play for time and avoid arousing suspicion. She is right. Try to believe me—and her. We must let things take their course. In two years' time you shall come and claim me and I shall be waiting for you, that I swear. But it is no good our proclaiming beforehand what we propose to do. What effect could that have, save to prevent our meeting at all? You've asked me so often if I love you more than all the world that I'm beginning to be frightened by your lack of confidence. Do you need so many vows? Oh, I know I've lied to you often enough! All the same, if I say I love you I mean it. So now—do you believe me?"

He read the note over and over again, anxiously, suspiciously, determined to probe its ultimate meaning; but love and dishonesty were so inextricably mingled that he found it impossible to separate them and say which was which. He could feel the difference, although he could not help thinking that one must necessarily cancel out the other; but when it came to trying to isolate one single, undiluted sentiment, try as he

would he could not do it. Certainly when she assured him of her love her words had an unmistakable ring of sincerity. But in that case, why this dissembling all over again? To delude her mother into letting her come to Paris alone that winter? She must know very well that there could be no question of any such thing! . . . Instinct warned him that, when it comes to surmounting apparently insuperable difficulties, honesty is better than cleverness, however much one may believe in it, and that the most brutal candour is better still: all the same, in view of his utter powerlessness to translate words into action, he could not help asking himself what possible good such candour could do in this case—the more so since it was only the lack of it in her, and a determination to force it upon her, that drove him even to consider running what he knew to be such a risk. Meanwhile, whatever the cogency of her reasoning, he could have wished to see love making her heedless, that he might be wise. Why, oh why was it that their rôles were never reversed? And now, in spite of his believing in her, he had no peace, but rather was troubled with an indefinable uneasiness, to which now was added the strain of waiting.

Since he did not know what Catherine was doing that day, and thus had no means of telling where he might have even a chance of running into her, he had made up his mind not to leave the house at all, in the hope that she might suddenly appear without

warning in the early afternoon to take him by surprise. But the day declined and each hour as it passed deepened his disappointment. From hoping that she would arrive a little early he was reduced to hoping that she would not actually be late, and from that that she would not be too late—until, in the end, his one desire was that she might still arrive before her mother, if only by a few minutes. But it was actually past dinner-time when they came—together. They were shown into Monsieur Varambaud's study. And while Madame de Laignes hurriedly apologized and explained Catherine followed Michel out into the hall to take off her hat. As soon as the door had closed behind them they paused (and that instant of silence, plainly discernible from the study, seemed to redouble Madame de Laignes's volubility). Then Michel's footsteps could be heard, then Catherine's, and at last their voices.

They fixed a number of places where they might meet next day. He went to them all, and all in vain; and, for the rest of her short stay in Paris, every rendezvous thus failed. Every day and at all hours of the day he received tiny notes from her to which he had no means of replying. Hastily written in pencil on whatever paper came first to hand, a page torn from a note-book, the back of an envelope, they indicated, usually after a few words to soothe the discontent which she guessed must be growing within him, a time, a street, a number. But by the time

the note reached Michel Madame de Laignes would already have changed the order of her calls, or omitted one altogether, or decided to accompany Catherine after having said she could go out by herself: thus, at the moment when they should have been meeting, Catherine, at the other side of Paris, would be raging at her helplessness and imagining Michel's feelings, her own grief sharpened by the thought of his anxiety and disappointment.

He would be early at the agreed meeting-place, and, not knowing whether Catherine would be alone or with her mother, and always afraid of blundering, would take up a position some way off. Then he would move nearer, walk up and down a little, slowing down as he walked away from the street by which he expected her to appear, so that when he turned about there would be more chance of her being there. Sometimes he would think he had seen her: that was her figure, that was the colour of her hat, her dress. His heart would leap dizzily. But it was not her after all: and his joy would evaporate, only to yield to new hope. He would start his pacing up and down again, peering through shop-windows at the clocks within, whose hands were never agreed, but who all agreed, no matter what time they made it, in creeping inexorably on. The time they might have had together was so short in any case, and feverishly he watched his chance of happiness moment by moment dwindling. Worst of all, perhaps, was the uncertainty as to whether

she would come at all; even the waiting was less cruel than that! At this very moment Catherine knew what he had yet no means of knowing, yet their hearts could effect no contact. Perhaps she was on her way to him now, already approaching the corner of the street where his impatience lay in wait for her? Or was she far off still? Or, if indeed she was prevented from coming, was she really suffering as he suffered? And agonizedly he strained to get into some mysterious sort of mental communication with her, to know the answers to his uncertainty, to draw her to him across space if she was vacillating and undecided. In his youthful ardour the power of the will seemed limitless, with nothing in the world capable of withstanding its full force; and in such mad assaults upon the impossible he exhausted himself, his whole being concentrated in the knotted and sterile fantasies of his brain, until only the intensity of his ardour still upheld him.

Once—it was behind the Luxembourg in a silent and unfrequented street—just as he turned he had a glimpse of someone very like her entering the house she had mentioned in her note. Had it really been her? He had had no time to see. The only thing to do was wait till she came out; and thus he waited for several hours, watching the windows in the hope that she might be moved to adjust a curtain, venturing on occasion to linger near the door in the hope of hearing her laughter on the stairs or the sound of her voice. But more often

the rendezvous she gave him were in districts far from his own and with which he was quite unfamiliar: at a bus or tram terminus, at a particular seat in such and such a square. And there he would stay till nightfall, until he was so worn out with misery, cold, and loneliness that it would be almost a relief to realize that there was no chance of seeing her now and that at last he could go home.

She dined with the Varambauds once more. The next day she left, and Michel, from a distance, saw her go. Concealed behind a pillar he saw her descend from the carriage and cross the station hall with his mother and sister: they passed through the barrier; the collector punched their tickets; and his eyes, filling with tears in spite of all his efforts, followed them still down the platform to the waiting train. Then they vanished. Something in him seemed to break, and suddenly his grief felt less unbearable and more profound.

As pent-up water will suddenly overflow its dam and pour on with redoubled power and swiftness, so Michel, after some days of discouragement and inertia, returned with renewed energy to an interrupted task and took up once more the novel he had begun at the end of his stay at Saint-Guénolé and had been working on at Thisy.

The idea had come to him shortly before the holidays, after seeing a play in his capacity of journalist—

wasn't he the editor of a review?—with Flandrin, who had been promoted for the occasion to dramatic critic of the *Receuil*. It had been a suburban performance given by the Civic Theatre Association, a group of unknown poets whose noisy fraternizing with the masses (under the pretence of educating them) was no more than the latest of repeated attempts to rescue their own names from a well-deserved obscurity. The evening had begun with recitations of their own verses and concluded with a performance of *La Révolte* by Villiers de l'Isle Adam.

At first excited by that high-flown and brilliant oratory, whose superficial glitter is so attractive to the young and unformed, he was soon set pondering the case of the heroine, Elizabeth, the wife of a wealthy man whom she has never loved, whom she soon comes to despise, but whom, nevertheless, she swears she will not leave until by her own labour she has paid back the equivalent of the material good she has had at his hands And what, wondered Michel, had a woman so pure, of such austere virtue, of such care for her spiritual needs, done with her body during those ten years of married life?

Wasn't it simply another case of that extravagant conception of feminine virtue, universally taught and universally accepted, which literature has analysed and elaborated in a thousand ways until now we find it glorifying the sullied virgin (already a literary heroine) in a new and domesticated rôle? A young

girl marries an unpleasant husband, whom she herself finds repellent, and at once her submission is counted to her credit, the author throughout his tale dignifying the by no means disinterested faithfulness with which she degrades herself with the name of virtue. Or again, you have some vicious and degenerate old man whose very presence fills his wife with loathing—and there too, the author, using her repulsion as a sombre background to throw up her virtue, exalts his heroine as a model of nobility and propriety, daring even—by what aberration—to call her chaste!

Even when there is no question of self-interest not only is this tainted submission itself glorified but the very motives that inspire it—as if desire, in the physical union of man and woman, was not one of the very elements of morality, as if the path of duty could ever be the path to degradation. One of Lamartine's novels glorifies betrayal and debauchery precisely thus; Esther, with her almost religious temperament, is the apotheosis of the courtesan in the hands of an ambitious lover whose mere instrument she becomes. And as for Corneille's *Polyeucte*—that triumph, as Michel had always been taught, of duty over passion—what was it really but the shameful story of a young girl who, at her father's behest, abandons the man she loves to make an advantageous match—so besotted by her senses that she can no longer say whom she really loves, and whose final choice is only made under the doubtful stimulus of danger and violent death.

If as a fact the cause of her submission had been simply ignorance of sexual life, her plain duty was to escape without further ado from the shame to which her father had reduced her, a shame no longer to be disguised by words: and thus she would have shown the way to all those whose ruined lives are now no more than sad examples.

For ten years Elizabeth had waited for the moment of release, and for ten years she had prostituted herself; and it was in his indignation over this that Michel found the subject of the novel he schemed to write. A young girl, separated from the man she loves, and in her ignorance allowing her mother to push her into marriage with a man who means nothing to her, succeeds in making her escape on the very night of her wedding. But on this foundation he grafted his own love-story, and almost unconsciously wrote of what actually might have been and what still, he feared, might be.

His first chapter was mainly a description of an afternoon at the Thiébaults', and showed Catherine, in the character of Jeanne Rouves, among her friends. It needed little effort to recapture in the depths of his memory the echoes of that painful past, and merely to recall his own sufferings was to experience again the sterile and conceited self-importance of the circle in which she had moved. The second chapter started with the summer holidays and Jeanne Rouves, deprived of her friends' society, left all alone. He

depicted the town in its summer guise—the deserted avenues, the smoke from the chimneys rising straight up into space, the dazzling, empty sky, her own cool house, in the coolest, freshest room of which she greeted the morning in a rose-coloured wrap, her churchgoing with her mother, or her visits to elderly relatives, whom he made odious or absurd. In the rue Notre-Dame all the shops had their blinds down, and in the shadowy depths within one might glimpse the dozing proprietor or the cashier at her desk with its bunch of flowers in a large vase. But soon idleness and boredom began to point the poverty of Jeanne's life and she became conscious of the stirring of vague and uncertain desires—particularly when she played Schumann at her piano. At last the day came to leave for the sea-side, and there it was that they met.

He wrote in the evenings after dinner, sitting at that very table with its black oil-cloth at which, fourteen years before, tracing his first pot-hooks, he had shed those bitter tears which were among the earliest memories of his life. Now its drawer had a large padlock on it and contained all Catherine's letters, arranged in chronological order. It was Catherine who had painted the garland of poppies on the paper lamp-shade, Catherine who had given him his pen-holder, leaving it behind her when she had gone last year. And even his ink-pot, a little glass ink-pot of the kind one buys in village stores, was

beyond price in his eyes because that too came from her. Two years before, leaving Saint-Guénolé at the end of the holidays and making a last tour of inspection of the house, she had found on the table of the room that had been hers an ink-pot still containing a few drops of ink, and this she had jokingly offered him as a keep-sake. But the lightness of her tone at a moment when he himself was overcome with grief had hurt him, as a sign of indifference and insensitiveness; and at once, in his need to absolve her of it, he had tried to repair the injury by giving her almost mocking remark the seriousness which it had lacked—and, to make the gift worthy of her and of himself, he had vowed, with mingled resentment and pride and with a fleeting prevision of all his future endeavour, to draw from that humble, worthless object every word that he should ever write. And now, here it was, enduring symbol of his life. . . . Abandoned by his father and his mother to all intents and purposes as completely as any orphan, shining with candour yet already in a way corrupted, he had hurled himself recklessly at the first manifestation of love that had appeared. He had taken it to him with open arms and pressed it to his bosom, quickening it with the double flame that burned in his own breast; now, as the result of this ceaseless effort, what should have been the flowery opening of life had become a stony and laborious ascent, and what had arisen as a spontaneous ebullition of his whole being had ended by becoming a strained

and joyless emotion, which only an effort of will could keep at such a pitch.

Meanwhile Catherine found herself at home again with all the dazed surprise of one returning after long absence. She had only been away two months, but the magnitude of what had happened in that brief period of her life seemed to put an enormous distance between the day of her setting out and the day of her return.

She looked round her room for some sign of change to match the change within herself, but it was just as she had left it. The furniture was unchanged, her various belongings were in their usual places; all looked as it had always done; only the scent she habitually used had grown stale in the close air of the locked room, and the silence seemed unnatural because the clock had stopped its ticking. She wondered how long it had gone after she had left, and peered at the hands beneath the curved glass face upheld by garlanded cupids playing with a goat, trying to determine the precise moment at which they had stopped. Had it been day or night? And had the hour and the minute to which they pointed been happy or sad for her; had it been unimportant, or had it been one of those moments upon which countless others depend, altering the whole course of a life? She would never know what moment she was destroying when she moved those hands. Slowly she started unpacking, tossing over the back of an armchair her

faded summer frocks, creased by the journey, bleached by the strong sea air and sunlight, and oddly out of place with the first fire crackling in the grate. To have them out of her sight she rang for them to be taken away, and after that they carried out her trunk; sadly she watched it go, thinking of the winter trips to Paris for which it would no longer now be used. At length the door was shut, she was sure of being undisturbed; and shaking off her depression, glad to be alone at last, she took up the key of the little bureau where she always wrote her letters to Michel—a familiar movement which she seemed to have last made scarcely five minutes ago. Then she pulled out the flap of the desk, and the four interior drawers appeared in their secret symmetry. She sat down and hunted for paper and blotting-paper; and, pleased at seeing them again, fingered her ink-stand and pen and opened and shut a box or two, finding among the many things she remembered with pleasure others she had quite forgotten. With a sudden movement she pulled out one of her secret drawers and turned its contents out on to the blue velvet of her writing-desk. The papers that tumbled out were still faintly scented. She began looking through them at random and was soon lost in reverie.

It was evening before she began her letter to Michel, who at that very moment was working in his room.

“I’ve been tidying up my desk today, and the sight of all that muddle of things brought home to

me more than ever before the muddle in my own soul. Newspaper cuttings of criticisms or paragraphs about the plays I've liked, letters from friends and relations, bits of ribbon, souvenirs of every conceivable sort, photographs, dried flowers, holy pictures, little prayers—of the most efficacious kind! Everything to do with the past I threw straight into the fire; I don't want to keep anything at all to remind me of that. It's funny to think I should ever have imagined I had known love; it was something so very different! I allowed myself a smile of compassion as all those poor relics burned, but there was not the least shadow of regret—unless for the years that are gone, which I only wish I could live again for you. Oh, to be five years younger and to love you as I love you now!"

Since she had resolved to marry Michel (only because, now that she wanted to, what had before seemed quite hopeless immediately became possible) the thought of the difference in their ages had oppressed her as an irremediable misfortune; she was haunted by the fear of growing old. For the first time she began to think of the wasted years and to realize that nothing could ever bring them back: the only consolation for the squandered youth and emotions she so regretted was that in any case he would then have been too young. But as much to minimize her own regrets as to salve the vanity which would not admit she might have been wrong, she tried to persuade herself that a few years earlier she would not have been able

to love him as she loved him now, and that true love required a certain maturity of spirit not to be found in adolescence.

To provoke the desired reply she asked him:

"Is it better, do you think, that I should love you as I love you today, when I am older than you, or that I should love you as I used to love and be younger?"

And thenceforth all her letters were full of the same anguish, harping always on the same fears, as though all she wrote were but part of a single, endless letter.

She was haunted by the fear that one day, when he was able to marry her, he would suddenly no longer wish to, finding her too old to be his wife. But she was also afraid—ah, perhaps even more!—that though he might no longer love her he might yet marry her in pity. And she confided to him that this seemed to her so horrible that the bare thought of it brought tears of rage to her eyes. But next moment, with the ingenuousness of those who love, who are like little children to be reassured in the face of any evidence by a word from father or mother, she begged him to say if he would ever find her too old for him.

As all things to a man possessed point to his own tormenting *idée fixe*, so with her: the mere sight of a grey thread in a friend's hair was sufficient to cast her down into despair. The people she saw every day never seemed to her to be ageing or changing in any way, and this kind of sudden proof that in fact they

were changing bore heavily upon her. She said, indeed, in one of her letters, that she had inevitably been brought to realize that if she did not notice the changes going on in others how much more must she be unaware of those taking place in herself.

She had discussed all this with an older friend, eager to know if she felt old (she was twenty-nine), and if she was afraid of growing old; and this friend had answered, first, that she felt as young as ever, second, that ("just like me," declared Catherine) nobody ever seemed to guess her age, and, finally, that whether she now seemed as old as she was or not did not worry her in the least, since she only valued her youth for the sake of one person, and he had assured her that, old or young, he would always love her with the same unchanging love.

"And she said that with such a quiet smile, with such absolute conviction, that you could not mistake the nature of that love. He would love her old as he loved her young!—Oh, if only I could say as much, could feel as calm and sure! . . ."

And, confessing once more to the doubt which would never loosen its hold on her, she besought him for reassurance.

"Why," she asked, "am I so harassed by these torturing thoughts? Are you, so far away, thinking the same things? Do you too suffer? Is it simply the overflow of your own suffering that comes to wring my heart?"

But such tender solicitude, which in days gone by would have moved him deeply, arrived two years too late and, catching him now in full flight, struck a false note and disconcerted him instead of touching him. Wasn't it, moreover, a fact that only since she had begun to shudder at the dangers of the journey had she really determined to pursue it to the end? And did not her present anxiety prove retrospectively that she had in fact been lying before—or had at least not been whole-heartedly meaning all she had said when, two years ago, she had promised to marry him? He had shuddered then before the revelation of his destiny; the future opening before him had stared him in the face in all its cheerless harshness; and he had accepted it. It did not strike him that he was pitying no one but himself and that Catherine, though she might be pitying him too late, was at least not egotistically shutting herself up with her own sufferings; and he recalled the bitter tears of evenings gone by, the frightful calculations he had worked over untiringly, calculations that only the wildest good luck could have justified, but whose weakness even then would have been patent. And he remembered how he had pictured them at every stage of their lives, matched at first by youth, but with the difference in age becoming ever plainer, until that dreadful moment when, no matter how long her astonishing youthfulness might be prolonged, the respite granted them by destiny as a final mercy would at last come to an end.

Now, it was true, she in her turn was suffering. Sure at last of her own heart, it was his she suddenly began to doubt. And although this suffering did not leave him unmoved, he reproached her both for its belatedness and for her failure to make of it anything but a new occasion for uncertainty. The likeness between these two opposing impulses of an uneasy spirit—first in withdrawal, then in acceptance, though alike in their shrinking from pain—misled him into accusing her of merely replacing her former hesitations with new fears, and of thus reverting, in another guise, to the mistrustfulness she had once overcome.

THE DAY OF THE BACCALAUREATE drew near and Catherine, who had come to see their whole life dependent upon his success in this examination, showed even more anxiety and impatience than Michel himself. She wondered privately whether he would pass; but to encourage him assured him that she never doubted his success: he had worked, he deserved to succeed! Then, at the thought of his disappointment if he failed, and in a sudden apprehension of the worst, she sought to console him in advance, to deaden the blow, by imploring him not to despair if he should fail, and by vowing that she would wait for him as long as might ever be necessary. She was his, and whatever he asked of her she was ready to do. But hope reawakening soon vanquished anxiety, and she pictured him returning home in triumph, rejoicing as much for her sake as his own in this first step towards the realization of their marriage.

The third of November came, the day of the examination. If the news was good he was to send her a telegram, and she calculated that it should arrive about two o'clock. She braced herself to bear the

little scene which the arrival of such a telegram would inevitably precipitate, but the hours went by and slowly her fears deepened to painful certainty. He had failed! She had been right enough in saying that the unwonted sadness which had filled her during the last few days had boded no good and must be a presentiment of misfortune. Here the misfortune was: what would happen now? How much more must they pay for their right to happiness? No doubt Michel would bravely begin all over again; but oh, the disappointment! A whole year lost, and life was so short! Only thirty months to wait yesterday; and forty-two today! Twelve hundred and sixty days! Yet for a moment she had been so certain of success that even now she could hardly believe in failure and still clung to a tiny hope—that, dreading the shock he must know a telegram would produce, he had decided to write instead, and she would not receive his letter till next evening, or even the day after, coming as it must by the circuitous route they had now to employ (through Alice le Hombre, indeed, one of her convent friends whom she had won over to their cause and who now acted as go-between).

But even this faint hope vanished when his letter came. He had failed! Yet the set-back which had cast her into such despair and which she had supposed would render him equally despairing, he hailed on the contrary with a sense of deliverance, with cheer-

fulness almost, as marking the end of an intolerable constraint and the beginning of liberty. Surveying the new situation thus created he announced his decision, which was to push on with his novel and get it published; then, with the few thousand francs this would bring in, they were to elope to Italy and live there so that he might escape his military service. Faced with the accomplished fact, moreover, their families would give their consent to the marriage and provide them with at least enough to live on.

This was the plan which Michel unfolded with bland assurance, never imagining she would raise any objection: and Catherine stood aghast, as at the edge of an abyss into which she was expected to hurl herself with him. Once again she was confronted with the necessity for making a sudden and violent decision, and she knew already that she could not make it. And how would it end? What an endless prospect of bitterness and struggle! This step towards the fulfilment of their plans, whose postponement had caused her so much grief only an hour before, now seemed more dreadful than the set-back itself. How was she to turn him from this resolve? And supposing he persisted in it! All sorts of objections came crowding into her mind, and she caught eagerly at them, welcomed them, looked round for more. Striving thus to make a stand for reason in face of what seemed to her a piece of perfect madness, she endeavoured

to conceal her fears behind an assumption of calmness she was far from feeling, and began her answer on a note of perfect reasonableness, discussing his plan point by point with deliberate calm. But, lest her rejection of this plan be set down as a failure of love and thus lay her open to fresh accusations of faint-heartedness, with unconscious cunning she herself withdrew from the argument and offered instead the advice of a friend whom she had consulted and who was plainly disinterested since he knew nothing about their affair.

"You say you are going to write, earn a little money, elope to Italy, and settle there with your wife. Well and good: your wife evidently loves you so much that she will gladly go anywhere with you."

But, so the argument ran, in doing this he would be cutting himself off completely from his own and his wife's families and from all his friends.

"Admittedly," her letter went on, "during the first years of marriage you wouldn't think much about that. But once the first intoxication has passed—and I'll give you plenty of time for that: let us put it at ten years, which is a generous allowance!—you will have nothing left but your love. Good luck to it! But it won't be any longer that self-centred love that cares for nothing else in the world. You will find yourselves faced with needs, both intellectual and material; needs you will have no means of satisfying. Just think for a moment what it would mean to live out your

whole lives" (and the friend, with Catherine's pen, was made to underline the "whole lives") "in exile, penniless, all because you had broken with your parents. It would not be funny at all."

She added—and this was her strongest point—that anyway his book was not finished yet and could not be finished for another six months at least. And could he count on finding a publisher for it? And, if he did find one, how much would he get? And supposing it was not a success? In that case, of course, he would start another; but that, since it would be written with money as its sole end, would mean sacrificing his ideas, degrading himself: it would be the end of him! Doubtless his luck would turn in time, but not for three or four years. And could he even be sure of that? She cited a certain author who had met with no success at all until his eighth book. Eight novels—one every two years: that meant sixteen years!

"However," she continued, "here are my suggestions."

And she proceeded to develop the unexpected proposition—so at odds with what had gone before that the essential falsity of it was unmistakable—that he should anticipate his summons to the colours and get his military service over and done with at once. His father surely had sufficient influence to get him appointed to some clerk's job in Paris, where he would escape actual military duties and drill,

and would thus in the next three years have a great deal of leisure for writing, with only a little copyist's work to do. And in three years' time precisely he would come for his wife, who would go with him then wherever he wished. And all through those three years, spent, as they would be, in Paris, he would be close to the intellectual heart of things. She emphasized how essential this proximity was for him, Paris being the centre of literary practice, scholarship and influence.

"Just think a moment: three years of certain boredom, but after that complete and perfect liberty, with your wife wholly to yourself. On the other hand, an endless struggle, no money or resources, a hard life, and all those incessant little worries which kill the strongest love. No future, and, quite possibly—regrets!"

To end up with, dispensing at last with the fictitious adviser and resuming her own personality for the final assault, she turned to flattery. She insisted that he had an intellect, assured him that he might well become a force, implored him not to throw his gifts away. What regrets he would be laying up for the future! Years later, remembering the dreams he had once had, and realizing to what he had since fallen, he would come in his heart of hearts to hate the woman for whom he had sacrificed so much, the woman for whom he no longer cared enough to shake off the despair that possessed him.

"I don't want you ever to have to feel like that," she concluded. "I want to go on with the work I have begun. Already I've turned you into a man of energy and some self-confidence; and now I want the husband I love, of whom I am already so proud, to count for somebody—not for my own sake, oh no!—I would gladly relinquish all ideas of glory if they were to threaten our love! But that need not be: we can love as we do and you still be somebody. Only don't let's spoil what we've begun."

Of all that she said in this letter (and he did not linger over the flattery, which, far from touching him, only caused him a sort of uneasy embarrassment) his mind only retained one thing: she would not do what he wished. And all the arguments she poured out to disguise that one fact only served to reveal it the more clearly. The plan she suggested was as absurd as it was equivocal, since it failed to remove a single obstacle and would leave them at the end of the testing-time she wanted him to undergo face to face with the same difficulties, difficulties which would not have been removed, only put off for three years. And in all that what was there really but a playing for time on her part? Time for reflection, it seemed!—What an implicit avowal of incurable hesitation! She who knew nothing of the inner necessities of his life was now, just as he was becoming aware of them himself, trying to force him to set them aside.

"How does she imagine," he asked himself, "if

I can't stand life at college, even as a day-scholar, that I could endure to be a soldier for one single day?"

What, indeed, did three years' military service amount to but a sort of melodramatic version of boarding-school life among coarser comrades, with some cynical sergeant-major as tutor, and with death and imprisonment by way of impositions! And, not content with assuming that he could stand this kind of life, she actually expected him to do his work in such surroundings—as if a writer's work was not the expression of his very life, and as if any man's worst affliction, and perhaps his greatest fault, was not to assent to any course that might impair or ruin his chosen career! How, moreover, was he to remain faithful to her during those three years of waiting? There would be for him now no grateful abandonment of love to the intoxication of the senses; instead, he must strive to control the naggings of a wearisome physical need. Ah, she was indeed the sort of girl to drive her fiancé to lead a double life, half ignorant of and wholly indifferent to her who awaits him! . . . And it struck him that if their love really meant anything to her, as it did to him, she would never have called his plan mad, but would have regarded it as perfectly reasonable. They had only to wish ardently enough and that goal so hard of attainment, so far away, became at once quite easy to reach. Why then did she shrink on the very threshold of the door he had thrown open to her? Was she afraid of the end

or of the means? Irresistibly there came to mind other occasions on which she had flinched from the realization of something long desired, and he began to wonder if what she now revealed was not really so much a failure of love as an inherent weakness when it came to doing and daring. She had already thrown over one man whom she had imagined she loved; what was there to show that one day she would not abandon him too? And wasn't there a suggestion of forethought in her very haste to push him off to barracks? Once he was a soldier, how could he be sure of being free at the critical moment if it suddenly became necessary to do something, to fight for her, as it were? Wasn't it simply that she did not want him disturbing her own peace of mind or even, later, the treachery she planned? If she were really sincere the sole admissible objection she could make to his plan was the difficulty of raising enough money to carry it out. But instead of discussing ways and means for their suggested flight she dwelt only on its consequences. And, saddened more by the state of mind revealed by her refusal (for he was quite convinced that when it came to it he could persuade her into changing her mind) than by the refusal itself, he found himself wondering whether this clear-sightedness, this total lack of blindness in one otherwise so blind and inclined always to be the obedient slave of words, did not show even more clearly than the tender and anxious scruples of her love, her dislike and fear of

the unknown: at a safe distance that unknown was not so dreadful, and she could even contemplate following him into it one day of her own accord—provided, of course, that in that new country the ship by which they voyaged remained within hail, ready, if necessary, to take them home again.

For the first time her falsity really came home to him, and he realized that he no longer trusted her and that she herself must now be held responsible for things which he had previously ascribed to external influences. And since she had been deceiving him for so long, what was there to show that she had not deceived him long ago? Faint recollections stirred of Catherine's name being associated with that of Claude de Brionne, recollections which now became practically suspicions; and examining the past in the light of the present, it suddenly appeared to him in an entirely different colour. What did he know, indeed, beyond what Catherine herself had told him? And supposing she had lied? Had he any reason for believing her assurances that that love had been of no consequence at all? He remembered a thing he had forgotten for years, how an older boy at Saint-Loup had told of Claude de Brionne's boasting of having been Catherine's lover. If that were true! . . . For a while, in spite of himself, he gazed with evil satisfaction down these miry vistas, prey to a strange admixture of emotions—half dizzy, half incredulous. Then suddenly, without thinking, and with an almost cynical brutality—

which arose less from his suspicions, however (for instinct warned him against such reasonings), than from an unconscious desire to wreak his spite on her who had made such suspicions possible—he determined to question Catherine herself about it, in the hope of learning the truth, or at least of piecing the truth together from her replies.

The heart, however, which he had been doubting, lay unreservedly open to him. For Catherine suddenly resolved on a candid approach to the subject which hitherto they had never more than touched on in passing: she hesitated no longer, but told him herself about things he had so far barely heard of, returning to the past and placing it for him in its true proportions, with perfect good faith and without a hint of any reserve.

The period of her life to which he took her back seemed now so strange and empty that she could not find occasion even for regret. Vanity, idleness, force of example, and a sort of vagrant and unstable sentimentality seeking for an object to which to attach itself had all combined in her to produce a pale and scentless flower, doomed from the outset to perish. She herself had very soon realized how ephemeral it all was, had often indeed thought of making an end of it, and, only deterred by fear of the consequent plunge into the unknown, had imagined, had sometimes even found herself desiring, the end of a love which at first she had wished to believe eternal. But this unimportant

past, lingering on, had had unexpected consequences which even now might hold a certain menace. She had said nothing about it to Michel before, partly because it seemed to her that even to mention it would be to set a seal to its existence, partly for fear of destroying her own happiness by what seemed to her a superfluous candour. Now, however, realizing the evil her silence had done, she reproached herself for having kept it from him for so long. And passing rapidly from what he already knew to what he had not yet heard, as water pours through an opened sluice she seized the chance of telling him everything and unburdening herself of all this secrecy.

The year before, Claude de Brionne had written saying that at last he had a settled job and that once again (since this did away with the previous objection to their marriage) he was about to demand her hand. She had not replied. After that there came a second letter, asking for at least the favour of a reply; but she had not replied to that either. This was what she had to confess to Michel now. But in face of the sudden gravity which the words assumed as she wrote them she was filled with anger against the man who was the cause of all this irritation and embarrassment. And, insensible to sufferings which she had imagined only to deny or to condemn, she thought of him simply as a vanquished obstacle whose debris littered her path, and a sort of destructive fury punctuated her sentences with bitter phrases. It did not occur to her

that the ambiguity she had so long unscrupulously allowed to exist might reveal all the disloyalty of her shrinking and faint-hearted soul; she swore the whole thing was dead and buried and done with now, and only wished that every memory of it could be erased for ever from her mind.

ABOUT THIS TIME an elderly cousin of Monsieur Varambaud's, Madame Despériers, wife of a magistrate whose whole career had been spent in the provinces (Monsieur Despériers had retired when only a simple magistrate on the Civil Tribunal at Laon, his religious convictions having interfered with his advancement), took it into her head to settle near her only remaining relative, and persuaded her husband to move to Bois-Colombe, on the outskirts of Paris. Wealthy and childless, she had more than once indicated her intention of leaving her personal fortune, which had come from the family as it was, to Monsieur Varambaud. As for Madame Varambaud, although it was with a mixture of dislike and distrust that she viewed the arrival of this woman whose appearance and character equally repelled her and whose life was now to be joined so intimately with theirs, she welcomed her with the greatest cordiality, protesting to her husband that her own comfort and preferences were of no importance compared with his pleasure and their children's interests.

As soon as the new-comers had settled in the Varambauds paid them a family visit. Soon afterwards Michel reappeared at Bois-Colombe, this time alone.

And from then on, deserting his grandmother and ceasing his excursions to Thisy, he took to going to see his cousin every week, soon several times a week, drawn by what was for him the novel attraction of a house in which he at once felt at home and where he seemed to find something he had long sought.

A very correct maid would admit him with a fleeting smile at once deferential and familiar; would reply that Madame was at home; and, resuming her wooden expression, would conduct him across the garden and through the hall, and knock at the door of a little drawing-room, announcing him in perfectly expressionless yet somehow faintly friendly voice: "Monsieur Michel, Madame." Entering, he would find Madame Despériers knitting by the window, sitting there very upright in her sombre dress in a little cherry-coloured satin arm-chair, her skein of wool in a basket at her feet.

At the maid's announcement she would let her work fall to her lap and with a sort of ironic arrogance, not without sympathy, stretch out her hand as if for him to kiss, withdrawing it immediately to remove from her bun the long needle she had only the moment before thrust into it. For a moment, while she found the right stitch in her knitting, she would hold up the work to her eyes, peering at it until her face seemed to be actually touching it. Then, the stitch run to earth, and talking away to Michel or answering his questions, she would draw herself up again with a rigidity that

emphasized the peculiar way she had of holding her head thrown back. Her hair was perfectly smooth and straight, arranged in little lacquered curls on her forehead, brushed back from the temples to reveal narrow, rather long ears from the distended lobes of which hung two large, lustreless diamonds.

She was still so close to the life she had only just left that at every moment something would remind her of it. She spoke constantly of Laon, of the ladies she knew there and the friends she had left there, of her husband's relatives, whom she described in detail to Michel, mostly country gentlemen living on their estates, or officers in a garrison town, their names often preceded by titles on which she would linger with evident satisfaction. Monsieur Despériers' brother, an old sailor and a bachelor, whom Michel remembered meeting once at his own home, had just been made a vice-admiral (naval officers at that time enjoying an independence denied the magistrature), and whenever his name came up Madame Despériers never omitted to give him his full rank. And in her inconsequent accounts of his pursuits, tastes, and character Michel glimpsed something of that worldly and elegant way of living that his mother never tired of mocking for its absurdity and pettiness: but the sole hint of disapproval evinced by his cousin was the remark that that kind of thing came pretty expensive and that the admiral managed to get through a good deal of money one way and another.

Often, casually, their conversation would turn on Madame Varambaud. And the very way she said "Céline," or enquired what she was doing, for all the care she took to conceal her feelings from Michel, revealed an almost insurmountable antipathy, a complex emotion of ironical amazement and curiosity.

Hearing of Michel's arrival Monsieur Despériers would appear in his smoking-jacket and black velvet skull-cap. His entry gave the impression of being merely an incident in a vague perambulation of the house. He would reply with great politeness to Michel's greeting, raising his little cap and blandly inclining his fine, clean-shaven face with its fringe of delicate white side-whisker; then he would establish himself in an arm-chair and sit there, motionless and silent, listening to their talk.

Carried away by his ardent search for the truth, and, since it was the truth, speaking it recklessly, Michel would vehemently give utterance to all that had lately struck him or interested him, regardless of convention and careless of his listeners—using, indeed, as though they were simply there to listen, the very tone he used among his friends. Christianity was plainly a prejudice to be exploded, the army was neither more nor less than a school for crime; without ever going into details he never hesitated to say exactly what he thought of both. The effect of his words would appear in Monsieur Despériers' sudden start and stifled exclamation at some particularly subversive remark; and a moment

later the old man would get up and silently disappear.

The door would scarcely be shut behind him before Michel had recovered from his momentary embarrassment and was off again worse than ever. In everything he touched on he displayed the same spirit of revolt, amazing his cousin as much as he distressed her. She sometimes even asked him (but in vain; for he could not explain) how it was that such a change had come about in him: it was scarcely two years ago, indeed, since he had sent her one of those little prayers to St. Joseph which must be sent to five different people if they are to be efficacious. She remembered, too, that just about then Michel had been sent home from school for passing round the class a royalist manifesto written in his own hand and containing (she could never suppress a smile when she recalled Madame Varambaud's horror and indignation) an attack on the President of the Republic himself!

She had never dreamed that it was at her own house that, eight years ago, during the holidays (the only time the Varambauds had ever stayed there), history had first come alive in Michel's eyes, with such a sudden vividness that it never even occurred to him to connect it with the dead phraseology taught him in its name at school; and among the opposing forces revealed to him then he had been moved to take sides. It was a novel, lent him by Madame Despériers, that had so

overwhelmed him, a precise and moving account of the revolution in its darkest phase, with the King dead and the Queen imprisoned in the Tour du Temple. The heart is a surer judge than all the reasonings of the intellect, since these, no matter how justly argued, in the end take their tone from the emotions, and an honest mind will inevitably arrive at a very different conclusion from that anticipated: so Michel, confusing in one embracing hatred the crime itself and the words that sanctioned it, sided at once with the victims. And they, in the very moment of their passing, revealed to him a mode of life he had never dreamed of, a mode of life he mourned with a sense of personal loss. He found it again in Sir Walter Scott. Slowly, unconsciously, the germ of pity and justice matured: and the very contrast between those vanished times and a present which was the negation of all he admired made him aware (though ignorant even of the word "politics" and in spite of the fact that his father never discussed such questions) of the disgust he felt for a republic which, borne in crime, pursued an existence of muddy mediocrity. Thus, to the astonishment of that ardent republican, Madame Varambaud (she was far too intelligent to deal in lost ideals!), he had taken to proclaiming royalist opinions. To begin with, this had seemed to his mother simply another of his typical extravagances—until the day when her alert interest decided that it was dangerous and liable to hinder her husband's advancement. The class-room incident had

been exploited by the master in question, who saw in it an unhoped for chance of promotion, and it had only been hushed up with difficulty. After that the approach of the 14th of July always found Madame Varambaud a little apprehensive, and, indeed, to preclude any demonstration on the part of Michel, Madame Armelle had standing orders from her daughter to cut every single lily and white pink in the garden a week before that date.

The void in that eager soul was filled at last by love. In love he found a compensation for all his humiliations, all his loneliness, all the ugliness and mediocrity of the people who surrounded him. And now, between him and this love, the only good he had ever possessed, was reared the insuperable obstacle of his obligation for military service. There were no compensations for the rigours of such a servitude; and behind it, vaunted as necessity, he sensed that vile instinct of democracy to reduce us all to the lowest common level. Reality was distasteful, but the past was no more than a vanished dream, and he turned instead to those who, quick to exploit the universal *malaise* resulting from such a pernicious levelling, were endeavouring to lead astray the last remnants of good sense in that decayed society. It was a society in which the crowd, waxing strong in its consciousness of power, turned from the gratifications of envy to the plottings of hatred, and, having once determined that everyone must be a soldier, now resolved that no one should be, to the end that it

might be unfettered in its crime and its reorganization of force for its own purposes.

A new journal had just been started in Paris, and for several weeks beforehand it had been heralded by posters all over the place and by processions up and down the boulevards and more populous streets of little, narrow, two-wheeled carts, their pent-house roofs formed of placards, dragged along by poor wretches got up in uniform.

The poster depicted, against a desolate and livid landscape, a woman dressed in mourning, her emaciated face upraised, one hand shading her eyes, the other pushing back her long veil, as, with a sort of anxious fervour, she watched for the coming of the dawn—and that, precisely, was the new paper's name—the first gleam of which already showed along the horizon. The correspondence of this representation with his own innermost feeling at once attracted Michel. He bought the paper regularly. And, seduced by the rigidity of the principles upon which it was based, principles stated with a vehemence which reproduced the very mood and intransigence of his own debates with his friends, he modelled himself on the writers who compelled his admiration and soon learnt to bring to bear upon all problems a judgement simplified to extremity, making a clean sweep of all that might oppose the fulfilment of the limited yet far-fetched ideal which had now become his.

Since he was shown the injustice of the universe only

in its effects on society, evil was reduced for him to the iniquity of the few. And since these few held the highest places it seemed necessarily to follow that, with all their power, they must also have the means of doing good; so that the persistence of evil was irrefutable proof of their unworthiness, since they had the means of destroying it in their own hands. Deluded by this syllogism Michel was now incapable of sympathizing with poverty or with misery of any kind without at the same time denouncing riches and contrasting the virtues of the poor, the employed, who were all virtue, with the probable vice and certain idleness of the wealthy, the employers. And in the adroitness with which the men he followed instilled reason and good sense into the masses, who still clung to the old Catholic dogmas, while leaving their goodness untouched, he saw only further proof of their intelligence and, in the habitual words of the paper itself, their desire for justice and truth.

One afternoon, wandering at random through the streets, he turned into the place du Palais-Royal and was surprised by the extraordinary number of newspaper sellers running shouting through the traffic and the crowds with bundles of still unfolded papers. It was a special edition of *l'Aurore*. Here and there people stopped to buy and stood reading. The whole square rang with cries echoed more faintly from the rue Saint-Honoré; and their straggling echoes set up a sort of clamour which rose above the rumble of the

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city or was suddenly submerged in it, as the reiterated cries were lost in the distance or broke out close at hand with renewed energy.

“*J’Accuse!* by Émile Zola! Zola’s letter to the President of the Republic! *L’Aurore! L’Aurore!*”

Michel signed to one of the hurrying newsboys who, panting and crimson-faced, thrust out a copy of the paper, snatched Michel’s sou in the same coarse, chapped hand, and made off again, yelling as he ran.

Where Michel stood, at the corner of the place du Palais-Royal and the place du Théâtre-français, the crowd was seething. To get away from it he walked a little way along the arcades and, stopping beside one of the columns, started to read his paper. But to plunge like this, so suddenly and astonishingly, into the heart of this strange drama in which the accused bore the face of innocence while the judges were pilloried as guilty, filled him at first with such amazement that he was quite incapable of forming any opinion upon it; and, while seduced by the ring of sincerity in an accusation which seemed to have been dictated solely by an impulse to spring to the defence of innocence, he could not help wondering how such an extraordinary injustice could have come about.

Still under the influence of this event, but in reaction now against the scolding incredulity with which his father had countered his excitement, and already beginning to believe what he had been told elsewhere with so ardent and, as he thought, so disinterested a

conviction, he went and discussed it at length with his cousin next day, offering as his own statements that were about as considered as the arguments with which she immediately opposed them, and which he could not possibly confirm: all this with a sort of excited impudence which evoked sighs from Monsieur Despériers, sighs for the first time containing a note of barely concealed impatience.

During dinner, to which he had invited himself, Michel pursued the subject; nothing could turn him from it. When at last Madame Despériers, determined to bring the argument to an end, remarked that no matter what might happen she would never dream of doubting the word of a French officer, he replied with a good-humoured jeer and a favourite phrase of his friend Lavarenne's—namely, that in his eyes an officer was no more than a professional assassin. That was the drop that caused the cup to overflow. Monsieur Despériers gave vent to his usual little grunt, but this time added in a low voice a few words in which he made no attempt to disguise his opinion of Michel. The rest of the meal was eaten in silence and in a temperature decidedly chilly; and when it was time for him to go Michel decided it would be best to keep away for some little time. In this resolution he was forestalled, however, for the very next day his father, taking him aside with an air of faint embarrassment, told him that their cousin had written asking that Michel should come less often in future since her

husband found his visits rather tiring. She herself, however, thought very highly of him. And Monsieur Varambaud repeated:

"She thinks very highly of you!"—as much as to say that she must be humoured, as upon this depended some secret interest—but without making it clear whether he regarded his son as instrument or beneficiary of this interest.

Meanwhile the emotions unloosed by Émile Zola's letter to the President continued to spread, and a rapidly increasing confusion of mind became everywhere apparent. Almost every afternoon now Michel would make his way to the Latin Quarter, fascinated by the excitement which reigned in this centre of feverish opposition to the defenders of the accused; and, his love of excitement overcoming his growing convictions, he would hang about the approaches to the Law Schools, waiting for a demonstration.

As the law students poured out the scene, until then fairly quiet, would grow more and more animated. Scattered groups, from which came occasional isolated outcries against Zola, would meet and join in seething turbulence, like a ferment which quakes before boiling up. Suddenly all these same endlessly reiterated cries would merge together into one single, rhythmical clamour, and the column of demonstrators would set off down the rue Soufflot to the Boulevard Saint-Michel, holding up the traffic and shouting—only the

incessant blowing of horns from the trams could penetrate the din they made, as the horses moved forward at a snail's pace. Arrived at the Pont Saint-Michel, which was invariably barricaded by police, the demonstration would retire in disorder. Then, after a moment's wavering, as though on the point of breaking up, the demonstrators—less, it would seem, led by those in front than animated by a sort of collective soul which enabled them to act in unison without leadership—would all suddenly and of one accord start off in another direction, marching at random down lighted streets which the column filled with its uproar, only to make a sudden dive into some dark, narrow by-road where it seemed to gain in intensity what it lost in breadth. But sooner or later a police squadron would appear with a heavy clatter of enormous boots. Tall, running shadows would advance down the street, barring it from side to side with their sombre cordon. And like a flock of pigeons chased by a dog there would be a general flight and dispersal through the side-streets, followed by another rallying, another forming column, but a column each time smaller, until at last there was nothing left.

More often than not Michel would lounge away his days and only start work after dinner. At first, full of a sort of carefree energy, he would read over what he had written the day before. But the idea which ran through the corrections and erasures as a stream

twists between the rocks of a rapid would come to an abrupt halt with the unfinished line. He would cease gazing at the page and raise his head. And, his mind still floating between the images of the dying day and those which were about to appear at his command, he would pause for a moment hesitant on the threshold of that mysterious world which slowly his will was evoking from the shadows, before at last taking possession of it with a sort of calm and attentive gravity.

Once at the seaside, Jeanne Rouves met there the man she was to love—a character whom Michel, already showing a certain technical ingenuity, had scarcely indicated, and who was given weight solely by virtue of the contrast he made with the surroundings in which he moved but never mingled. They were quick to single each other out, and the similarity of their tastes and inclinations drew them together. Beneath the ironic or malicious eyes of the others they held themselves aloof, meeting to talk or read together, and little by little love came. As a sculptor will employ the most precious metals for the casting of the statue of his dreams, so Michel, in the composition of his book, used all the happiest moments he had spent with Catherine at Saint-Guérolé: their walks together, their readings; memories of morning sunshine as they walked back through the hot lanes beneath the great hortensias of the villa gardens; evening talks as

they strolled along the moonlit roads, walking a little apart from their families. But this happiness was not to last. Anxious and far-seeing, Madame Rouves was quick to divine their dawning love. And now Michel, recalling all he knew of Madame de Laignes, set to work with ironic high-spirits to draw the picture of a jealous and autocratic woman, whose frankness more often than not was merely a subtle kind of duplicity, and who interposed herself between them and cleverly kept them apart, imposing on her daughter, who invariably gave way to her, her own way of seeing things and feeling things, and even her own tastes.

And to underline the inevitability of the disaster that his heroine's faint-hearted submission was to bring about, Michel put into her mouth all those well-remembered arguments which Catherine had already used in defence of her own abdication: Jeanne Rouves, like Catherine before her, turned her own feebleness into a deliberate rule of conduct. The first effect of this was soon evident. Madame Rouves, anticipating the mutual avowal which she realized was only a matter of time and circumstances now, was quick to take advantage of a temporary absence on the part of her daughter's lover—detested only because he was that lover. On an excuse which she did not even try to make plausible she hurriedly left Saint-Guénolé with Jeanne, who, distressed but docile, had not dared to raise the least objection.

Believing that the impact of the book on Catherine

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Believing that the impact of the book on Catherine

would be all the stronger for her reading it as a whole, Michel, after outlining the plot in detail, did not refer to it again save indirectly or in a curt phrase or two to give her an idea of how far he had got. But when two or three letters running contained no reference to his work at all Catherine herself broached the subject:

“How is Jeanne Rouves getting on?” she asked. “I often think of her when I think of you; for, after all, she is both you and me.”

AFTER THE HOLIDAYS Madame Vianet and the Thiébault girls had evinced such jealousy and hostility towards Michel that Catherine found it impossible to talk to them as she would have liked about the one thing that occupied her thoughts, and was thus forced to look elsewhere for someone to confide in. Her choice lit on an old school-fellow of her convent days, Edmée Nollet, who until then had been scarcely a passing acquaintance. This was the new friend some years older than herself whom she so often mentioned in her letters to Michel. In their talks together, which became more and more intimate as they became more and more frequent, Catherine was surprised to discover a mutual similarity of ideas and tastes. The two ended, indeed, by coming genuinely to enjoy each other's company, although there was no real sympathy between them and each, in spite of intimacy, really mistrusted the other.

No matter what time she might be expected—and it was a rare thing if Catherine did not get a note at the last moment saying she could not come after all—she invariably arrived late and breathless, full of excuses offered in a theatrically childish voice and with

a disconcerting volubility, as if she had got by heart the speech she now poured out, full of apologies and explanations that no one had demanded from her. Talking away all the time, she would stand in front of the mirror briskly removing coat and hat; from the enormous hat and the too-heavy coat there would emerge a small, trim figure, tightly encased in a bright, close-fitting dress; the waist slim, the neck bare above its childish collar, the smile ambiguous, the fair hair swept up to make a sort of clown's top-knot above humorous, green eyes slightly tilted at the corners.

To the infinite exasperation of Catherine, who would be in a hurry to get her up to her own room for immediate discussion of their private affairs, Edmée, if there were visitors in the drawing-room, would linger there wantonly, full of polite nothings, as if she had quite forgotten the person she had really come to see. She would be all eagerness and deference to elderly ladies, manifesting extreme interest in persons and things she had never heard of. She was always the first to jump up to offer a chair or a cushion, and the most persevering in drawing out shy girls. But when Catherine had at last succeeded in getting her upstairs, scarcely would the door be closed behind them before she would be talking of a very different sort of life, describing its happenings with a sort of restrained abandon, as though divided between fear of saying too much and the need, while playing the heroine to such a willing confidant, to conceal from

herself the sadness of the insoluble situation into which she had been caught up less by her own will than by force of circumstances.

Catherine had heard from others of the affair which had so influenced her friend's whole life. Six years ago one of the young masters from the boys' school had come to the convent to give classes in literature to the older girls who were preparing for their final examination; he had been greatly attracted to Edmée and she had fallen in love with him; they had corresponded; and it was not long before he was received by her family; the subject of marriage had been already broached when he was suddenly called to take up an appointment in Paris. It was then that he told her quite bluntly that her fortune was insufficient to justify his marrying her and that what he needed was a wealthy wife with influential connections to help him on his career. In the same breath he announced his engagement to another girl and went on to say that he hoped this event would make no difference between them. She attended the wedding and grew friendly with the wife; and now she spoke of them to Catherine as of good friends, and indeed made a point of seeing them whenever she made one of her frequent journeys to Paris to stay with her relatives there. But what she really thought of him, precisely what their relations had amounted to in the past and what they were now, it was impossible to guess. Did she meet him in secret as well as in his own home? Was

he that mysterious "somebody" whom she so often discussed with Catherine without ever revealing his name? One might certainly suppose so, but it was impossible to be sure. But since this experience, which had cost her so dear and which had left her with a certain distrust of all men and even of herself, it seemed that all her deeper feelings were buried in the past, leaving nothing now but a sort of level-headed coquetry, like a shield behind which, provocative but cool, she seemed to wait for her revenge; behind that candid exterior lurked a determination that no matter what adventure time might bring, this time she would be victor, not victim.

Every time she went to Paris—which was generally every other month—she would bring back a new store of recollections, stories, and a mass of varied impressions, recounting with a kind of languorous excitement the thousand and one incidents of her stay, which itself always seemed to be surrounded and half-veiled in delicious mystery. Through the enchanted Parisian setting Catherine went with her to the theatre, to lectures, to sermons by famous preachers, or to great balls; she followed her down corridors of exhibitions or great stores, or went with her to the very door of some famous personage to leave her autograph album, which invariably returned enriched by some new signature, the signal for both girls to pore over the gilt-edged page, trying to analyse the hand-writing and determine the character revealed. Sometimes,

but very rarely, Edmée was even admitted to the house, and afterwards the visit would be recounted in the fullest detail. In short, Paris, love, fame and literature were all so intermingled in her talk that when Catherine herself indulged in any half-confidence she never had to hunt for a word to turn the subject in the desired direction, but could embark forthwith upon tales of love or oddity, or her secret dreams of fame, without raising the least objection or even appearance of surprise in her friend. And the letters she wrote to Michel after such talks were informed with such a palpable vanity that one day he could no longer suppress the doubt which had been troubling him, but which hitherto he had never liked to dwell on, and asked himself whether the emotion which gave her such intense gratification was really love at all, or whether it should not be given another name.

While he awaited, with an uneasiness which waiting only aggravated, her answer to the question he had ingenuously asked of the very person who had given rise to it, a letter came from Catherine with a suggestion which at any other time would have overwhelmed him with delight. Yielding to a longing to see him again, the more imperious since, although she was continually imagining him actually present, her imagination was at the same time visualizing the distance between them, she had suddenly come to a bold decision. Its very rashness, however, putting it on the plane of exceptional occurrences and, as it

were, outside her normal life, concealed beneath its obvious risk an element of calculation, since it would allow her to gratify her love without having to declare it. The idea was that he should come to her by night. Could he be away for a whole night without anyone knowing? she asked. She did not try to minimize the seriousness of the danger to which they would be exposed; indeed, though really quite sure herself that no harm would come to them, she insisted on it with an almost tragic emphasis, as though by doing so she might persuade herself that if at other times her courage had seemed to fail it had been reason, not fear, that had restrained her. Perhaps, too, she hoped that if she could see him face to face she would be able to dissuade him more easily from his own plan, by no means yet abandoned, and still a constant menace to her.

She was full of practical details for the carrying out of her plan, revising and completing them in a second letter which he received next day. It appeared that her friend, Alice le Hombre, was to come and stay for a few days in the course of the following week. This visit would come in very useful, since they might well need her help. The best time, if he could manage it, would be the night of the 18th—19th; he must catch the one o'clock train at the Gare de l'Est, arriving at Saint-Loup at five-thirty in the evening, or, if he preferred, the eight-thirty, arriving at ten o'clock. At four on the Thursday morning he would

catch a train which would get him back to Paris about nine.

"I haven't been able to get hold of an up-to-date time-table; so you must be quite sure to verify the times yourself."

He had immediately replied that he would come, and had begun to prepare accordingly; but his pleasure in these preparations was spoilt by the thought that he might have to start before getting the answer to his question, a reply which he had come to dread to the point of being obsessed by it. But it did arrive at last, on the very day of his departure. In it she laughed at his fears and tried with tender irony to allay them. But before replying to his question she had translated it into her own terms, and it was no longer simply a question of whether she could assure him that her love was sufficient in itself and that her vanity had not, however unconsciously, seized upon it as a means of self-gratification: she drew an analogy between him as he was and an imaginary personage weighed down with fame, lingering over her exaggerated description of this figure as though to bring more clearly to Michel's eyes all the extravagance of his supposition, portraying an ugly old man, celebrated man of letters or famous painter, loaded with orders, a member of the Institute or the Académie Française—and having finally asked how he could think for a moment that she would ever make such a choice, she concluded with a "what could be more absurd?", assuring him

in the tenderest of sentences that of course she loved him enough to take him for himself alone and for nothing but himself. . . . Why she loved him, she went on to say, she did not know. She could not tell whether it was because he was so very like her or so very unlike her; but what she did know was that she loved him, more than anything in the world! And although Michel had a feeling that behind all this the real question remained untouched and essentially unanswered, for once the desire to greet happiness with an untormented heart induced him to waive the evidence and accept at its face value a reply which could not really satisfy him.

Since he was in the habit of going out every evening without anyone worrying about what time he would be back, nothing was easier than to keep his absence secret, provided he was back before breakfast next day. He decided, therefore, to catch the evening train. After dinner he went out in the ordinary way and, growing tired at length of waiting for a tram which never came, walked briskly to the station; but there he was suddenly filled with dread at the thought that he might meet someone from Saint-Loup who would recognize him.

With an apprehensive glance round he joined the rapidly lengthening queue which was slowly filing through the booking-office barriers; when it came to his turn he found himself involuntarily lowering his

voice as he asked for his ticket. Then, hurrying along the same corridor down which he had so often watched Catherine disappear, he found himself at last on the platform. Carefully avoiding the more prosperous-looking travellers, he kept among those from whom he need fear no recognition and climbed at random into a third-class coach and sat down on one of the wooden seats near the door. Soon the doors were slammed to, and at the far end of the platform the engine whistled. The gentle shock of the train moving off seemed to detach him from that part of the day which was like every other day and gave him an almost melancholy sense of solitude, a feeling that in the unknown which he was now approaching he could expect no support from anyone, and that for the first time in his life he would have to rely entirely upon himself. To husband his endurance, then, and to take advantage, as it were, of this momentary respite during which his goal was being effortlessly brought towards him, he set himself to still all feeling. With the increasing drowsiness of his body his thoughts too grew sluggish; and gradually, to the dull, monotonous rumble of the wheels conveying him among so many others to unknown and various destinies, he fell into a sort of nervous stupor, resting inert in the very bosom of the force which bore him on.

At irregular intervals, vaguely sensed between sleeping and waking, the train would come to a stop, and outside the mournful, weary-seeming cry of a

porter announcing the station would trail through the night; while in the carriage beside him a traveller, roused by the sudden immobility, would stretch his limbs. There would be a sound of footsteps, somebody yawning, a few indistinguishable words. Then the swinging light of a lantern would touch the window and pass on to the accompaniment of footsteps stumping heavily on the soft earth; the voice, for a moment close at hand, would fade into the distance, and there would be a moment's silence, broken suddenly by the sharp, nasal blare of a little horn; and the train would whistle in answer as it moved off again.

A glance at the station clock as they passed reassured Michel, and he relapsed into somnolence. But struggle as he would against it, sleep began to get a hold on him; he was vaguely aware of one or two more stops, then he fell fast asleep. He woke with a start, panic-stricken at the thought that he might have been carried past Saint-Loup; but feverishly rubbing the mist from the window he was able to make out the indistinct glare of the city and then to recognize the outlying features: a wearisome suburb through which the train ran at street level; then, soon afterwards, a bridge. At last the lights of the station came in sight. The train slowed down, stopped. Michel waited until the rest of the few passengers had moved off before he got out. When the last of them had disappeared he made his way to the exit across the echoing station hall,

deserted now, feeling absolutely dazed in face of a reality his mind still shrank from accepting.

He gave up his ticket hastily, hurried through the exit, past a couple of cabs and a hotel omnibus or two, and emerged into the station yard, whose low surrounding buildings were delicately veiled with ground-mist. The air was mild and damp. A dozen memories came vividly to mind as he re-established contact with this first impression of the town, faintly distorted now by the shadows and the trailing mists of night.

The avenues with their leafless trees and gardens were deserted and dark. He followed them as far as the canal, crossed the bridge, and plunging into the heart of the old town made for the Cathedral square. At the end of this street, on a corner to which he was drawing nearer at every step, he would see Catherine's house. He came to the corner and turned into the square; and the image memory had preserved was immediately and effortlessly one with the image before his eyes.

There it was, as it had been all the many evenings when, far away, he had sought to conjure it before his eyes; as it would be when, home once more, he would think of this moment, already passing: silent, inscrutable behind its tall gates and narrow garden, to all appearances asleep: the closed shutters gave no hint of the impatient desire which watched within and leapt to meet his own. They had agreed that he

should not go near the house until all the lights had gone out: after that, a light in the left-hand window of the first-floor would be the signal. But the appointed time had come and gone, and with despair in his heart he watched a light still shining in one of the attic windows. It was doubtless a maid reading in bed, and he wondered how ever long she would go on reading.

He began walking slowly up and down, his eyes fixed on the house, and trying in the midst of his own growing distress to imagine what Catherine must be thinking as, face glued to the window behind the shutters, she strove to recognize the wavering figure that approached the house, swerved aside, and seemed to wander away again into the mist. One after another the various lights that had still been shining here and there in the houses round the square when he first arrived were extinguished. The clock struck half-past ten, and then the three-quarters. Suddenly, at last, as though engulfed in the blackness that instantly succeeded it, the light in the attic window vanished; and at once a light appeared in the dark window on the first-floor. His previous emotion immediately gave place to a new and even more intense one as he swung back to the gate and waited.

Faint sounds were heard: the house door opening, light footsteps crossing the strip of garden, the breath of a voice saying:

“Is that you?”

And almost before he had answered a key was slipped

into the lock and the gate swung slowly on its hinges and Catherine was there.

In the space of a second the long months that had separated them were annihilated; it seemed so natural that they should be together again that they quite forgot the peculiar circumstances in which they now met. Without astonishment, almost without confusion, they exchanged a greeting of a gaiety quite unforeseen, and while Catherine closed the gate behind them he slipped through the half-open door into the house, leaving her to come in after him. Only then, with sudden gravity, did they kiss. Their lips met, and they stood clasped together, lost in the immediate present, which the darkness and the silence bound about them.

Nevertheless, a sense of the danger they ran made him the first to rouse himself. After the weariness of the journey and the dampness of the night outside this warm and equable atmosphere sapped his will with its delusion of security, its suggestion of rest; but he roused himself to whisper:

"What shall we do if anyone comes?"

Catherine rapidly outlined the plan which she and her friend, not wishing to leave anything to chance, had worked out together in advance in case things should go wrong: everything had been foreseen; at the least suspicious noise (Alice, who was on guard upstairs, was to give a warning cough) he was to go and hide in the cellar, while she herself would make

for the kitchen and start making tea for Alice, who would say that she was not feeling well. . . . But to cut off all retreat of his own free will by hiding in a place from which he might never be able to get out seemed to him the height of foolishness; and without even pretending to discuss the plan he declared that if danger did arise the best thing for him to do would be to try the back door, since it seemed likely that everyone's attention would at first be centred on the front of the house. And this was the plan they finally agreed upon. When everything had been done to ensure his safe retreat, and all the doors leading to the back of the house had been opened, they made their way together back to the hall, where, used to the darkness now, he was able to make out the shapes of various pieces of furniture, a mirror, long draperies: seated on the lowest tread but one of the stairs with minds all at once relieved and happy, they started talking in low tones, hand in hand and cheek to cheek, pausing now and again to strain for a sight of each other in the darkness, and ever more astonished at their good fortune as its reality grew ever more incontestable.

Recalling her disappointment at his failure in his examination she said only how sad she had been at having to bear it alone and far from him, and she told him how she had worried on the day of the exam, and how she had waited for the telegram which never came, and of her wretchedness when she had had to realize that there could be no more doubting what had

happened. And he in his turn told her how his parents had taken his failure. But soon memories gave way to plans, and he brought up the subject of his novel. She began to question him; and soon they were repeating themselves and interrupting each other: what each had done, what each had written, what each had thought, was all gone over again, in whispers. Once or twice they heard creaks, and at Michel's imperious gesture Catherine broke off immediately. Then, head turned towards the head of the dark staircase, he would stand listening, motionless and alert, ready for instant flight, until under the long strain the arm on which his whole weight rested would begin to tremble convulsively, regularly. No further sound ever followed the first; it was a false alarm each time. And Catherine, immediately reassured, would return to the interrupted kiss, the uncompleted sentence, with all the joyful enthusiasm of relief, as though nothing had ever alarmed them; but Michel remained apprehensive, his vigilance unrelaxed. There she was, lover and companion turn by turn, and so wholly yielding that her very submissiveness brought back the more sharply to his memory the resistance she had never yet ceased to offer. Was it really possible that she who was now there so close beside him, separated from him, indeed, by nothing, could ever refuse to follow him if objections were made to their marriage? And he had scarcely asked himself that question before he was filled with an irresistible

desire to put it to her too and have it answered and settled for good.

But instead of the hesitating and evasive reply he expected, he was astonished by the unreserved ardour with which she promised to do what he asked.

Determined to force her to recognize her vow, and, remembering past experience, mistrustful even in this access of joy, he said again:

"That's settled then: as soon as I can get enough money together you'll come and join me? That's a promise?"

"Absolutely!"

"Swear you will?"

"I swear I will!"

And now, after these almost solemn joys, her delight in feeling herself his at last overflowed into a kind of reckless gaiety to which danger gave an added spice. In reaction from such serious talk she became struck all of a sudden with the humorous side of a situation which she had anticipated would be so tragic. Really, they might have walked straight out of a farce! There they were, laughing at parents' useless precautions and triumphing over the obstacles ranged against them! Knowingly or not, everyone had a part in their romance. The indispensable go-between to help on their designs; the duenna, fast asleep in the attic; even Madame de Laignes, though all unconsciously, appeared in the rôle of derided guardian. And to round

the comedy off in the time-honoured manner only one thing remained: to penetrate to the very heart of the stronghold, and snap their fingers beneath the watchdog's very nose as the curtain fell!

At that moment a faint cough came from Madame de Laignes' room; and Catherine at once suggested that they should go up to Alice's room, on the pretext that they would be safer there. Although this meant going through the room where her sister was sleeping she guaranteed the success of the enterprise with a conviction which seemed founded on absolute certitude of impunity, but which in reality had no firmer foundation than a reliance on that rule of the drama which says no comedy must ever end unhappily.

Michel assented: he knew he was afraid, and he knew too that in his uncertainty of what to do this fear might be the reason prompting his refusal.

On entering the house he had taken off his shoes and put on the soft slippers he had brought with him. Now, to be safer still, he took these off too. And with the silent caution of a burglar he mounted the staircase behind her, stair by stair, selecting and testing every footstep and pausing every other moment to listen. When they reached the landing she left him while she went ahead to make sure that the way was clear. The last light patch of her dress vanished and he found himself standing alone at the top of the stairs in hostile darkness, with no possible retreat, and simply asking to be discovered—exactly opposite Madame de Laignes'

room. And it was with a multiplicity of feelings, the chief of which was a sense of indiscretion so strong as to oppress him like a breach of good manners, or even a lack of decency, that he listened to her loud breathing, sometimes interrupted by ominous silences, or by the even more ominous creakings of a bed groaning beneath the weight of a shifted body.

Suddenly he was aware of a whispered conversation going on in the neighbouring room. Françoise had woken up. He nearly lost all control and rushed downstairs regardless of noise, but he was incapable of stirring without an effort so violent that he could never have made it, even to save himself, and he remained motionless where he was, his throat contracted, his heart pounding, awaiting catastrophe; so overwhelmed by the dangers that seemed threatening on all sides, so engulfed in the wave of despair that broke over him now, that he was conscious only of a sudden and inordinate regret for the adventure upon which he had embarked. Catherine reappeared silently from the shadows. With her lips to his ear she murmured what he had already guessed: Françoise was awake. Then, in whispers barely audible, they argued once more the best thing to do. Catherine declared that he could still come. He objected that if Françoise saw him—as she undoubtedly would—she would shriek and rouse the whole house.

But Catherine held to her purpose, insisting on it with all the authority of which she was capable, only

warning him to take care not to knock against anything on the way.

"Look out for a little cupboard on your left!"

One way seemed as dangerous as another, and he gave way before her impetuosity, incapable of offering resistance. She left him decisively and went back to the bedroom; there was a short and agonizing spell of silence; then the whisperings broke out anew: Françoise was not yet asleep. But there was no going back now: the moment for action had come.

Holding his breath, he tiptoed forward, slowly, slowly. The bed was close to the door. Catherine was leaning over the pillows, talking softly to the little girl, keeping her whole attention. He dropped down and, still holding his slippers, crawled round the bed on hands and knees; and all of a sudden he was surprised to find himself no longer afraid, only intolerably humiliated by the idea of taking advantage of innocence like this and abusing the confidence of a child. His mind was suddenly unbearably clear, and with a curious aloofness he could despise now the very movements that were carrying him towards his goal. He kept muttering to himself:

"Of course, it's sheer lunacy! Sheer lunacy!"

Scarcely had he got past the bed before, forgetting all prudence in his impatience to reach cover, he rose to a crouching position and, still bent low, in a few rapid strides gained the door of the bathroom. He reached it with a sense of salvation, breathing more

freely in this new atmosphere with its fresh, familiar perfume, and stepped across to the further room, pausing on the threshold.

From the darkness came a girlish voice.

"Is that you, Catherine?"

For a moment he expected Catherine to answer, thinking she must be just behind him; then, alarmed at finding himself alone on such an occasion, but affecting assurance to cover his embarrassment, he managed to bring out a half-jesting word or two, which immediately evoked a light exclamation of amusement.

"Oh! Good evening!"

"Good evening, Mademoiselle!"

The voice continued:

"Where's Catherine?"

He explained that her sister was awake and that she was waiting with her until she fell asleep again. He followed up this explanation with apologies for his unprecedented visit, spinning these out with a good deal of facetiousness, partly to show off, partly to fill in the blanks in a conversation that was beginning to prove difficult. It was only the subject-matter that was wanting, for his unseen listener seemed perfectly at ease. She seemed, however, more interested in the man than in the conversation, for she suddenly remarked that she simply must know what her visitor looked like and announced her intention of turning on the light. And in spite of Michel's protestations and

half-joking appeals to her to be gentle with his vanity and spare him a scrutiny which must, in the circumstances, be so very much to his disadvantage, the room was immediately flooded with light. Tableau! . . . To one side a bed, and sitting up in it, with one arm outstretched and hand still on the switch, a young girl with hair still elaborately dressed, clad only in a lacy nightdress whose whiteness brilliantly threw up the dark skin and sparkling black eyes beneath their thick and level brows: on the other, in the very middle of the floor, with an ironical smile rapidly becoming a grimace, a young man in a city suit with a pair of bedroom slippers under his arm.

For some seconds she stared at him boldly and with a curious insistence, apparently oblivious of the fact that if she could see, so also could she be seen, and that the scrutiny was mutual. There was another sharp little click, and the flood of light was gone and all was darkness again.

At this moment Catherine reappeared and at once a lively conversation sprang up, punctuated by outbursts of suppressed laughter at the evening's doings. Soon however this began to languish; asides between Catherine and Michel grew more and more frequent, until at last Alice tactfully remarked that she was getting very sleepy, wished them goodnight, stretched out in bed and settled herself for the night.

Then, huddled closely together in the big arm-chair to which Catherine had led him, they began all over

again on what had been said so many times already, remembering a dozen different things they had forgotten before, and striving to extract every ounce of pleasure from the brief time allowed them and to stifle the apprehension that lurked beneath their delight; and all the while time went on, and they heard the clock strike hour after hour without being conscious of its meaning.

But gradually an increasing uneasiness made them aware of the passage of time, until it finally began to spoil their pleasure in being together. Michel was the first to suggest going, and Catherine hardly opposed him, although it was more than an hour before the time fixed for his departure: they hastened their farewells lest chance, which had served them so well hitherto, should fail them now, and parted in a sudden access of high spirits at having succeeded so well, and full of a happy confidence of soon meeting again.

THERE WAS NOTHING he could do, however, to attain this desired end save work away at his novel and get it finished as quickly as possible; and as soon as he got home Michel set to work on it again with a passionate earnestness, sustained by the hope that had swelled their hearts at parting. The night he had spent with Catherine had been a dream for them both, but, remembering it now, he remembered too what had once been and was no more. He knew very well that their final union was still far away, but his sense of a new closeness to Catherine was so strong that he could not but feel that some tangible consequence must result from their renewed contact; and he could not believe in a permanent separation—how could they possibly be kept apart for so long? That they would see one another again was certain; and frequently! Somehow or other they would manage! And their first exchange of letters, recalling hours on which Catherine lingered, helped to prolong the illusion. But as the days went by and nothing fresh happened, his conviction gradually weakened. And at length he came to realize the foolishness of his hopes, like a prisoner who has fondly imagined that escape can only be a matter of days and

is full of fantastic and futile plans, only to acknowledge at last the inescapable walls of his cell. Almost in spite of himself, then, for his only desire was to share his life with her, he began to build up a life of his own again, of regrets, and of hope, and of work; and the very slowness of such reconstruction augured well for its permanence.

At the end of the previous year Lavarenne had ceased attending the Lycée Sully and now went every day to the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, where he was under a special tutor. Michel met him every day at five o'clock as he came out of college, and they walked home together through the Luxembourg Gardens with one of Lavarenne's schoolfellows, Henry Désormeaux, one of the poets he had roped in when *Receuil* first appeared.

Désormeaux, as a poet, seemed to be hesitating between two different manners of writing, or perhaps he regarded such versatility as the mark of a superior mind; at any rate, he had published in succession first a series of orthodox little poems of philosophical intent and then a number of other pieces which, by virtue of the typographical arrangement of the lines, might also have been called verses, but which in fact were subject to no rules and had no meaning other than what the individual reader cared to read into them. The former poems were signed with a discreet yet simple anagram, both to guard against the possibility of a veering fashion, which might later cause them to weigh somewhat heavily upon the reputation of a

writer who would by then be famous, and also with an eye to keeping alive a certain curiosity which, if things should turn out well, it would be his privilege later to satisfy; but beneath the latter, whose licence might be taken as a serious quest for form, but whose very excess enabled them to be passed off if need be for what he could not but consider rather neat jokes, beneath these appeared the author's own name, disguised by being chopped rather tellingly in two: thus—Henry des Ormeaux.

In one of his sonnets, dedicated to a mysterious unknown (whose name, also graced with a particle, had the requisite air of pseudonymity about it), he extolled the beauty of the body as well as of the soul, and exalted a phenomenon which his dedication seemed even more desirous of revealing than his verse—unless (supreme mark of eclecticism!), with all the wise man's disdain of the crowd which laughs and cannot understand, he was perhaps mystically celebrating the very contrary of his significant title, *Lesbos*?

If his freer manner was original in so far as it was different from anything hitherto found in any literature, it nevertheless managed to resemble very closely what was being published everywhere by a host of new and much discussed reviews, each with its little public, each priding itself on revealing a new art to the world at large. Among such it was all virgins and golden-haired lads, knights of the Holy Grail and knights of the flowers, mystic lilies, fountains rippling into basins.

The grass was blue, the dawn had its candours, roses wept. Echoes, laughter, trills, arpeggios were heard on every side. And what violins, what lyres, flutes, harps, psalteries, and mandolins! As for the language, it was as curious as the thought: breast-plates were bloody, hours lethal, kisses eburnean. At any time one might encounter floating constellations and blanched or coppery magnificences. Splendour became splendescence to rhyme with erubescence. The sun lost its name and became the solarific orb.

This poet was the son of a publisher of popular songs of the *café-chantant* kind, one Ludovic Désormeaux, who had accumulated a handsome fortune by exploiting the lower instincts of the people and those whose calling it was to gratify them. Fat and pallid, with prominent globular eyes and scanty blond hair which emphasized his protuberant forehead and precocious baldness (he was always complacently passing his fine and carefully tended hand over his bald brow), young Désormeaux looked like a cross between an adolescent Nero and an English *chef*. Fortunately it never occurred to him that for an unsympathetic eye nothing could have been easier than to picture him in white cap and jacket before the central range of some vast hotel kitchen, and he invariably saw himself draped in the thousand folds of the Roman toga, gravely advancing beneath a lofty porch and discoursing upon philosophy and art. Indeed, this conception of himself had influenced his choice of a career.

At this period almost every day brought fresh developments in the Dreyfus affair, and Michel was always full of the latest news, which he had probably read about for the first time that morning in *l'Aurore*, and which all three friends would immediately proceed to discuss. One day he got hold of a piece of unpublished news which really seemed to settle the question of Dreyfus' guilt, and arrived full of it to his friends—quite forgetting, in his self-importance, that this untimely revelation was very much at odds with his own convictions, and, indeed, compelled to accept it unreservedly in order to lend sincerity to his communication.

One of the magistrates in his father's court at the Palais de Justice had told him (and his source was unimpeachable) how a French counter-espionage agent in the employment of the German ambassador had found a torn sheet in that ambassador's wastepaper basket, and on that sheet there could still be made out, among much else comprising Dreyfus, certain words which clearly referred to him: "That scoundrel D. . . ."

There was not much time to enjoy the authority conferred by the revelation of such a secret, which Lavarenne too seemed to believe and regard as gospel truth. The charge was soon made public and *l'Aurore's* retort to the imputation soon re-established their tottering faith; now both believed more strongly than ever in Dreyfus' innocence.

In spite of his philosophical scepticism even Désor-

meaux himself, like most of the old band of contributors to *Receuil*, was a Dreyfus partisan; but in his case this was less the outcome of a considered opinion than the result of an instinctive loathing of all discipline; for somehow, in the turns and twists of the trial, it was the principle of discipline that had come to be at stake—discipline, degraded though it might be, but on which the whole of the society which had given it birth had now come to depend utterly and entirely.

Occasionally they would meet a procession of demonstrators against Zola in the rue Soufflot. And standing motionless on the kerb Lavarenne and Michel, in silent fury, would watch it pass by. Often, when the bulk of the procession had moved on, Désormeaux would draw himself up with a smile of lofty irony and utter a "Vive Zola!"—scarcely raising his voice, however, above normal, as though restrained by considerations of decorum, and in such a tone of slight and mocking over-emphasis as successfully allowed him to make the best of both worlds.

If it was a demonstration by their own party he would fall in between Lavarenne and Michel and march a short way with them, pretending to shout with great energy. But on reaching the Medici cross-roads, no matter how the other two pressed him to stay, he invariably slipped away.

On more peaceable days they would make for the Luxembourg Gardens. There their conversation would

usually turn on their friends, and Lavarenne would hold forth acrimoniously about one or another, tirelessly returning to some fancied grievance, or, with evident satisfaction, exposing a weak spot or an absurdity in the character he was pretending to analyse. But sooner or later he would return to his own domestic troubles. His grandmother, at his grandfather's instigation, had refused to let him have any more money, and he spoke of her with coarse and resentful malice; indeed, he apparently made no attempt now to restrain himself even in her presence, and would boast afterwards to his friends of his annihilating retorts. Thus he had once exclaimed, although, of course, she would not have understood the hidden philosophical meaning:

"When you married my grandfather you married a bit of meat with a bone in it!"

A blunt enough metaphor which, reproduced in its proper context, moved Michel to fits of laughter but drew from Désormeaux only the slight shrug and swiftly repressed smile of one who is shocked, if also faintly amused, by a lapse of taste.

In order to make it plain to himself as well as to others that he was a member of that aristocracy of which he read in fashionable novels, Désormeaux plumed himself on his unquestioning acceptance of the little constraints as well as of the customs of that world he believed to be his, and, generally, on showing himself in everything he did a perfect gentleman—

to this end, with what he took to be the last refinement of scepticism, reducing all things to mere outward show. Never, thus, did he speak of his father or mother save in terms of deepest discretion and with the most marked respect and affectionate solicitude. He would, however, pass without a pause from an affecting remark about his mother to an account of some party he had been to the day before which he himself would mockingly style a disgusting orgy; then, with the utmost complacency, he would go on to describe it in fullest detail, whether vile or trivial—until, all at once, with complete seriousness, he proudly declared that at the height of all the drunkenness he had behaved with the strictest propriety and so saved appearances—though without its being clear why, or for whose sake, or in what circumstances, the appearances had been saved.

“Oh well,” he said to Michel one day, “morality for me is simply a question of what is and what is not done.”

And really, brought up as he had been without religion and without ever an appeal to conscience, he may well have been the dupe of his own apophthegm, beyond which nothing had ever tempted him to progress.

By force of hearing Désormeaux call himself “a man of the world” so often Lavarenne had finally quite come to believe it; and since it was quite out of the question for him to aspire to any such pretension, he could only

assuage the hurt to his self-esteem by ridiculing the object of his secret envy. When Michel laughed at Désormeaux Lavarenne laughed too, and often encouraged his mockery. One day, however, he cut Michel short in the most curt and unexpected way, turning on him, to his astonishment, with inexplicable hostility, and coldly reproaching him for doing precisely what he himself had so often done before but now seemed quite to have forgotten.

“My dear fellow, it’s easy enough to laugh at Désormeaux, but it’s very pleasant all the same to deal with a man of decent family!”

When, however, they had other friends with them, it seemed that the more Désormeaux showed himself eaten up with his own self-importance, the more Lavarenne tried to emphasize the contrast between them. To all appearances carried away by his own high-spirits, he was in fact merely doing his best to run away from his own helpless jealousy, though he was not aware of it save as a feeling of irritation and uneasiness: he would, for instance, suddenly interrupting Désormeaux in mid-sentence, leap on to a bench and deliver himself of a display of gymnastics; or if Désormeaux, with all the airs of a connoisseur, called attention to some girl they were passing, he would immediately rush off in pursuit, overtake her, turn about, and walk back, staring at her unashamedly as he jostled past, afterwards expressing his agreement with Désormeaux at the top of his voice, or, more

probably, hurling after her an ugly or offensive phrase, cruel as it was careless.

But sometimes it was Désormeaux himself he attacked. Brandishing his sword—that is to say, his cane—he would hold him at bay in a bend of the avenue down which they were strolling.

His adversary, thus provoked, would lend himself to the game with smiling condescension. After begging a moment's grace, invariably accorded, in order to lay his thin student's portfolio carefully down on a bench—he would place himself on guard, head well back and legs flexed, his hand seeming to flutter behind him as though scarcely attached to his wrist. There would be an exchange of thrusts, and Désormeaux would cry "touchê," as though they were masters fencing, in such tones that a vulgar spectator might have been forgiven for imagining that he meant "Je touche!" Then he would pause and glance about him with a brilliant smile of the sublimest self-satisfaction, leisurely mopping his face with a delicate handkerchief extracted from his cuff.

Since the only technique known to Lavarenne, whose knowledge of fencing was exclusively derived from novels of the cloak and sword school, was to lunge straight before him as though spitting an ox, it usually happened that art was forced to yield to blissful ignorance, and that Désormeaux, after a final smashing blow, was forced to admit himself beaten—but not, of course, according to the rules. He would then explain

the principles of the thrust, make Lavarenne copy him, and their interrupted duel would turn into a fencing-lesson given with all the friendly assurance of a master instructing a novice, the mistakes underlined with disapproving little clicks of the tongue or painful grimaces, and often accompanied by an exclamation which Lavarenne always insisted could only have been rendered by the use of the Greek letter ψ .

"You thrust too hard! Oh, much too violent! Pss-s-s!"—unless, perhaps, he himself was forced to explain away a faulty stroke by pleading fatigue. That, indeed, had been the case in a recent public bout.

"I could hardly stand towards the end. I really thought my arm was broken. I even had an attack of cramp. Really, I was quite alarmed!"

They would leave him at his door.

"See you to-night?"

The answer was very rarely yes; he had richer friends with whom to spend his evenings. But he never failed to have an excuse.

"My dear fellow," (looking very worried) "I'm afraid I can't possibly manage to-night; my mother will be alone and I couldn't leave her all by herself."

About this time (and it was some compensation for his disappointment at his son's failure in his examination) Monsieur Varambaud was appointed Vice-President of the Civil Tribunal of the Seine. What a

day that was for Madame Varambaud! The first congratulations came by the morning post, then the telegrams began to arrive. And then, just as Monsieur Varambaud had left for the Palais, at about eleven, there came the two rings on the bell which invariably announced the arrival of Madame Armelle.

Madame Varambaud, who had already started dressing, went to open the door herself. Mother and daughter embraced with exclamations of delight; then, still rattling away, and without even giving her time to take off her hat, Madame Varambaud dragged her mother after her into her room. Madame Armelle seated herself at one end of the chaise-longue on which her daughter's dress was laid out and launched into a voluble and minutely detailed account of just how she had heard the news and exactly what she had been thinking ever since: while Madame Varambaud, with even more than her usual agitation, bustled to and fro between the little dressing-room and the long mirror of the wardrobe in her bedroom, dashed into the next room to worry Cécile to finish her homework, clashed her bunch of keys, and continually opened and shut drawers. At length she hurriedly put on her dress, clambered up on to a chair to fetch down her hat-box, warned Cécile that it was time to go, and installed her mother in front of a large basket of mending (simply, of course, that she might have something to do if she got bored during her absence): her hasty farewells were mingled with warnings that the maid

would be going out and urgent entreaties to be sure to answer the bell if it rang, as she had ordered some cakes for that evening and it would probably be the confectioner.

Leaving Cécile at her class, Madame Varambaud, regardless of the earliness of the hour, set out upon a round of calls which lasted the whole afternoon and right on till dinner-time. At first she was obliged not to go too far away from Cécile and her class, but as soon as she had collected her again there was nothing to restrain her from ranging farther afield, and she and Cécile went on and on, paying calls on everyone they chanced to find at home.

With some she would be proudly flattered at the compliments paid her, to others she extended a good-natured patronage. Most of her acquaintances were old friends from the Dompierre days, re-discovered when she came to Paris; many of them were married to wealthy business men outside her regular circle of friends, and she only kept up their acquaintance because the memory of old days served to emphasize her present eminence and render it the sweeter.

Such foolish questions as they asked her! Proving that very few people really knew anything about the duties and obligations of the magistrature. Now that Monsieur Varambaud was Vice-President, when would he be President? Or—in the hope of profiting by so exalted an acquaintance and gaining admission to some famous trial—wouldn't Monsieur Varambaud be presi-

ding now at the Assizes? And Madame Varambaud had to explain the difference between civil and criminal law: barristers presided at the Assizes; but her husband sat on the Civil Tribunal and presided over a court of civil law, although the Civil Tribunal had its Correctional Courts as well. And she expatiated at length on the esteem in which her husband was held by the President himself, on his widely recognized knowledge of law; everything about him, indeed, was food for her vanity—the early hour at which he would now have to sit, which would mean his having his *déjeuner* at ten o'clock: the weight of the papers he had to carry—for he would never take an omnibus or have them carried for him by one of the office-boys at the Palais, as all his colleagues did; the over-work which was bound to follow: even his new chambers were a source of satisfaction to her. And by way of reply she would be handed back in terms of the warmest appreciation all the eulogies she herself had just lavished upon her husband: the call would come to an end when, such compliments being exhausted, a fresh subject was introduced.

In the long 'bus rides between her points of call, with Cécile beside her muttering over her next day's lesson from one of the books she had taken from the satchel on her knees, Madame Varambaud would sit in a daze of happiness, going over in her mind all the items of her joy, her ears deafened rather by the clamour of fame than by the rattling of the 'bus windows. For a long

But this glimpse of her apotheosis by no means blinded her to all the smaller privileges attached to her husband's new post, to say nothing of the benefits to herself, of which she proposed to take the fullest advantage. He had been offered a police pass; of course he must accept it! And then there would be free tickets for exhibitions, perhaps even for theatres. And now at last she would be able to realize a life long dream of appearing regularly at the annual public *concoure*s of the Conservatoire of Music and Dramatic Art!

Back again at home, she found the concière waiting for her with quite a little mountain of letters and cards. She took them up to Monsieur Varambaud, whom she found already embarked on the task of answering those that had come earlier in the afternoon. Madame Armelle was sitting with him, reduced to silence by the respectful fear which her son-in-law always inspired in her, but making up for such muteness with an incessant involuntary dumb-show expressive of her own inner satisfaction. From time to time Monsieur Varambaud would reach across his desk to hand her a letter or card of a particularly flattering kind, and Madame Armelle, importantly adjusting her spectacles, would read it aloud, sometimes twice over, to ease the torrent of words pent up within her by this self-imposed silence.

Almost at once dinner was announced, and they all entered the dining-room together. Madame Armelle was dying to discuss all the whys and wherefores of

her son-in-law's appointment, but Monsieur Varambaud affected to keep merely to little details of a practical kind. He began by asking his wife not to forget to order some more visiting-cards with the new title:

"Order three hundred, will you?"

And in that bald figure might be heard all the satisfaction which he would not permit himself to express in words. After that he set up a peevish grumbling about the extra work his promotion meant.

He called his mother-in-law to witness:

"You've seen for yourself how I shall have at least a hundred and fifty letters to answer—not to mention cards, to which I certainly shan't reply!"—a comprehensive indication of all the people his new position would allow him to neglect.

Finally, to make it clear that he was quite unmoved by the general excitement, he asked his wife, as he always did, what she had been doing all day. She enumerated the various people she had met or called upon: and every one of these names, awakening in his mind the very echo of the compliments his wife had received, was for Monsieur Varambaud a source of satisfaction—for all were inferiors now, or equals at the most.

Dinner had scarcely come to an end before Madame Armelle, at the mercy of tramway time-tables, had to leave for Thisy. Monsieur Varambaud went back to his study and spent a few moments opening and reading the letters and cards that had come by the last

post and had just been put on his desk by the maid: then he picked up the papers of the case he had been studying and proceeded with the drafting of his judgement.

But although he had not realized it before, the day had been a tiring one, and about eleven o'clock he laid down his pen and—invariable ritual at the close of the day's work—picked up the diary in which he recorded everything that happened to him, trivial or important: it had its own place among the volumes on his desk arranged according to size beside the stationery rack of official notepaper—a Civil Code, a Code of Civil Procedure, and a dictionary.

This appointment was the fifth stage in his career as magistrate. In thought he went back from one significant date to another, until he saw himself as a young magistrate again, taking the oath at the Dom-pierre Tribunal, and recalled how his sole ambition then had been to finish his career as President of the Villemeurthe Tribunal. And the thought of the course he had run filled him with deep inward pride, stirring memories of childhood: he thought how his father would have rejoiced in this promotion. He asked himself what the next stage would be. What might he aspire to now? After all, there was such a thing as luck. And he remembered that he had been a *substitut* only two years: his predecessor five. Swiftly he calculated the very shortest time he could expect to hold this new post; and contemplating with unavowed

hopefulness a future which still lay all open before him, purposely reined in his ambition to save himself from possible disappointment.

Then, suddenly, he thought of his son, and his pleasure was instantly dashed. What was he to do with Michel? What would become of him? The son of whom he had once been so proud, who for so long he had secretly favoured, was now the only dark spot in a life where all else seemed to smile upon him. He remembered how patiently he had tried to smooth a path which had seemed too rough—and it did not occur to him that such patience had been mainly the product of a sort of indecision in his own character, nor that he had been constantly afraid that any severity on his part might produce such an outburst from his son as would harm his own career. Now he simply did not know what to do, what course to take. Such a sense of impotence, in one so powerful, was paralysing.

But such thoughts were too heavy for a day that had been so full of happiness; and unwilling to end it on such a painful note, he wrenched his thoughts away, back to himself. And it was with a half smile which slightly lifted his greying moustache that he wrote on the blank page beneath the date and the day of the week:

“Appointed Vice-President.”

Then, with the same ink, he added on the next line:

“Madame Armelle to dinner.”

EVERY EVENING AFTER DINNER Lavarenne and Flandrin would call for Michel. According to the state of their pockets they would either make for the bar of a little theatre then at the height of its vogue, the Théâtre-Antoine, or stay by the fireside gossiping and drinking tea. But an event now occurred to split the little group.

For one afternoon Lavarenne, on his way home from college, had seen a girl in the street and been so taken with her delicate air, her sloping shoulders and fair hair, that he had gone up and spoken to her and actually arranged for a future meeting. On the appointed day, however, he seemed to feel the need of support, or perhaps of a witness, and took Michel along with him. These meetings grew frequent, until soon they occurred almost daily: and still on every occasion Lavarenne called for Michel—who, while highly gratified to be engaged at last on such an adventure, hardly knew what was expected of him in this new rôle and tried to cover his embarrassment with forced vivacity.

Sometimes he was delayed by the arguments which always arose now if he asked for money (often, indeed, until the very last minute it would look as though none would be forthcoming) and arrived late at the rendez-

vous, launching into an excited and voluble account of the domestic set-to as they set off together at a run: but when, gasping for breath, they finally came to a halt at the corner of a street or the entrance to a passage Lavarenne, as often as not, would give an exclamation of annoyance and, before they had had time to regain their breath, dash off in another direction, shouting:

"I'm a fool! It was the place de la République!"

Carrying their hats and flinging their overcoats over their arms they would dodge in and out of the traffic, running faster than ever to make up for lost time. And when at last they reached the appointed spot to find her already awaiting them Lavarenne's agitation was well cloaked by genuine breathlessness.

She gave piano-lessons: and since her pupils were mostly the wives and daughters of small tradesmen whose only free time was in the evenings, she would always arrange to meet them when her work was finished for the day, close to the house of her last pupil. And then, through dismal and deserted streets from which all signs of the day's activity had vanished, there would begin the strangest of promenades. Sentiment of any kind was banned, and Lavarenne, like the Juggler of Notre-Dame whose juggling was the only thing he knew, was obliged to hold forth about literature, scattering his usual paradoxes and asserting his admirations and his antipathies less for the sake of persuading the girl than for the sake of

keeping the conversation going and finding an opportunity for self-expression.

The girl had sufficient culture to take her part in such talk. Sometimes she had read the book under discussion, and those she had not read Lavarenne would bring her and so ensure a subject for future conversation.

Sometimes, when Lavarenne's and Michel's combined resources made it possible, they would go to a café; otherwise, on the pretext of seeking peace and quiet, they went to the Musée Grévin, a waxworks exhibition; and there, after wandering for a time in the wake of the infrequent visitors who lingered here and there before the brightly lighted groups, exchanging low-toned comments, they would return to the great entrance-hall and spend the rest of the evening sitting side by side in difficult alignment on the circular, red-velvet seat.

When literature and the more general subjects were exhausted they would get round by degrees to others of a more intimate kind, subjects which allowed the unknown to reveal her own opinions, tastes, and inclinations. One evening the question of religion cropped up, and she confided that until she was sixteen she had been very religious; but she had soon seen the falsity of the Christian practices, and that had been an end of it for her; now she was as profoundly sceptical as she had once been devout. Indeed, in almost everything she showed the same freedom of thought, and

Lavarenne and Michel, when they had said good-night to her, would walk home full of admiration for such a girl, agreeing that she was far above the average and truly intelligent.

But what Michel appreciated in her most of all was the straightforwardness of her character, a character so sharply opposed in its strength and its loyalty to Catherine's. Her family had tried to marry her off at a very early age, but she had taken the initiative into her own hands and herself written to the man they were trying to thrust upon her, declaring that she did not love him and would never marry him. It chanced that she had kept the rough draft of this letter, and in due course she allowed herself to be persuaded into showing it to Lavarenne, who showed it to Michel. And partly in genuine admiration, partly in a somewhat simple-minded desire to have the present object of his enthusiasm discussed in the intimacy of a love such as he tried to believe his own adventure was, he asked Michel to send it on to Catherine, on the pretext of getting her to analyse the hand-writing. It was only thus that Catherine learnt who this mysterious Marguerite Paumier really was whose virtues and intelligence Michel had lately been extolling at such length—without, however, saying anything else about her.

As for Catherine, she was like a lonely traveller in mountainous country, seized with dizziness on the

narrow path to which the road is reduced, and hesitating on the brink of the precipice which must be skirted before the still veiled summit can be reached: the farther she advanced the more numerous were the obstacles that beset her, the pitfalls, the perils of every description. She swung now between extremes of despair and of gaiety, without reason, and almost without cause; a tender phrase in one of Michel's letters, or a pleasant feeling on awakening, immediately attributed to him, could make her happy for the rest of the day; but next day, if it was overcast, or if there was no letter from Michel, or if there was only a curt note containing no reply at all to some particular question she had asked, then she would find herself suddenly weighed down by a horrible sense of oppression in her heart—that heart in which only recently, with shame and vexation, she had discovered a new emotion—jealousy! She, Catherine, was jealous! And in the infrequent periods of calm between these moments of moral crisis, that part of herself which observed her own behaviour examined the symptoms of jealousy with a strange and bitter curiosity. But suddenly this all-enveloping and menacing wretchedness took definite shape.

One November morning—it was her birthday—the post which brought her a letter from Michel into which he had slipped three violets, brought also a basket of costly flowers with a Paris postmark but no indication of the sender's name. Three years before, and in much

the same mysterious circumstances, she had had a similar present, and had imagined it must be from Claude de Brionne. But if it was, why those two years of silence? And what could be the significance of this sudden reappearance? In a flash a fantastic idea came to her: that this unknown admirer might be a suitor already approved by her mother. And completely losing her head, she sat down there and then and scribbled a desperate letter to Michel, giving him the florist's address and begging him to find out what he could.

The implications of such a gift worried Michel far more than the gift itself, and he set off at once for the florist's, his head full of challenges and terrific scenes; but the florist was impenetrable. His exasperation was now turned against Catherine herself. Was she really incapable of refusing to accept such a present, if her mother would not do it for her?—and Madame de Laignes' tacit consent seemed to him an incomprehensible piece of impropriety. Accepting it was as good as accepting the sender's addresses. And he wrote Catherine a letter in which indignation found vent in many and varied reproaches; he concluded by reviewing as usual what he and Lavarenne and Marguerite Paumier had been discussing for the last day or two, and compared Catherine's powers of reasoning with those of his new friend—as if he found it incumbent upon him, after such severe criticism, to provide her with an example now.

Two days later the morning post brought him Catherine's reply. The very first lines revealed her almost painful distraction, so entirely disproportionate that it seemed to indicate not so much fear of what was only a hypothetical onslaught as the utter despair of one who has suddenly, bleakly, realized what she will be like in face of certain danger. To such an extent had she come to identify Michel with her conscience that the voice of one was for her the voice of the other, and if the one was silent then nothing could be hoped for from the other; and she reproached him tearfully now for holding aloof and leaving her alone and unsupported just when she most needed succour. Such perils surrounded her! Marriages were always plotted in this underhand way.

"What shall I do?" she exclaimed. "Oh, I shall die!"

And she consoled herself with the thought that death would be peace at last—no longer to live, no longer to think, no longer to suffer at all.

"Last night I plumbed the absolute depths of despair. Don't ask me why—I don't know. I saw the future in its darkest colours. This morning I was still miserable and wretched. And then your letter came. It's all like a nightmare. You don't seem the same at all. You aren't my lover any more. My heart is arid. Only a dreadful sense of emptiness and fear and cold remains. It's terrible. If only I could cry. But I can't. Tears seem to have fled me along with all capacity for feeling. There is no goodness in me any more. It is as

understand. There are plenty of women all over the world whose ideas on many things are a thousand times better than mine I would never dream of trying to hold you by force; you are free”

The horrible words seem to bruise his heart; and a heavy bitterness, a fury of vindictiveness rather than of grief, mounted from unfathomed depths of his being and filled his brain with poisonous vapours. To speak of selling herself in marriage! And yet she knew very well now what that meant . . . What was the matter with her? What on earth *was* she? And he gave way to a sort of tragic fantasy in which he pictured her after some months or perhaps only weeks of sorrowing, agreeing to receive the husband her parents had chosen for her. At first she would refuse him, of course: but she would accept him in the end. And he pictured her as she would be, not happy, but excited, living in a kind of dazzled dream until the very eve of her wedding. And then that night—the night before the wedding-night—the past from which she had cut adrift would reappear to her once more like a warning phantom Royan, the beach, the garden-seat where he had kissed her, her visits to Paris, Saint-Guénolé, the little coast-guards’ hut, the tumbled cliffs from which so often they had watched the gulls wheeling above the plunging seas—their very arguments and quarrels, all that had been so sweet and all that had once been so bitter—all would pass again before her eyes so vividly, so clearly, that for a

moment the dream would be more real than the reality. For a long time she would sit thus, dreaming over the first chapters of that unfinished story which might have been so great. The clock in her room would strike and strike again. . . . But when at last she dried her eyes it would be to save them from being red next day. . . . Oh indeed she was the sister of all infamous women!—Of all those who awake one morning from a short and troubled sleep to find themselves with amazement in a stranger's arms, dulled already, or perhaps already not unwilling: women who might have shed tears of shame or tears of joy . . . but who are now no more than slaves of him whose bed they share, the bed they will enter submissively and of their own free will when night falls again; women who have fallen from the enchanted heights of love to the natural animality of those who have renounced the privilege of choice. And although their hearts may even yet not quite have forgotten all they once felt, Nature herself teaches them submission, and the most rebellious can do no more than close her eyes before the shame which pounces on her naked flesh, and cover her face with a degraded hand. And when in solitude they try to summon up a proper hatred for the feelings of disgust from which they still shudder, they weep and moan and call upon death: hypocrisy equalled only by the vileness it seeks to hide. For do they ever decline the abhorred embrace? Is there a single one of these victims (whose submission, by the way, rapidly loses its amateurish-

ness) who could not immediately find the means of escaping there and then from the tyranny of the husband who constrains her? By shaving her head, for instance, or, when she goes out, wearing an old-fashioned dress—a hundred years old, or perhaps merely last year's!

He remembered an old ballad Catherine used often to sing, which they had argued about without his ever being able to make her see his point of view. It was the tale of a young peasant girl, told in the first person. Her lover was penniless; the cow had died, her father had broken his leg; and out of pity for her poor, distracted mother she decided to marry a rich and elderly suitor whom she did not love—old Robin Gray. And then, the very day after her wedding, the lover who had gone away to seek his fortune, taking her pledge with him, returned to surprise her with a full purse and a joyful heart. And the door was opened to him by a woman with his lover's face, but a woman who was no longer his lover. He went away and was never seen again.

Watching Catherine in the centre of an admiring circle unfolding this ugly song in her sad, pure voice beneath her mother's proudly smiling eyes, he wondered if these people had really lost their senses, or, if not, how they could all be so blind. The very act of her singing "*et près de moi dort mon bon vieil époux*" seemed to him so thoroughly indecent that he was amazed that nobody else found it so too, and he could

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Watching Catherine in the centre of an admiring circle unfolding this ugly song in her sad, pure voice beneath her mother's proudly smiling eyes, he wondered if these people had really lost their senses, or, if not, how they could all be so blind. The very act of her singing "*et près de moi dort mon bon vieil époux*" seemed to him so thoroughly indecent that he was amazed that nobody else found it so too, and he could

not conceive how, even if no one else stopped her, she was not restrained by an instinctive modesty. He had tried in vain to make her see; and at last, to keep him quiet, she had promised never to sing the song again, since he disliked it so. But one day, quite by chance, he heard that she had been singing it in his absence, and such treachery was the more wounding since it seemed to foreshadow another, and to call up a faint echo of the horrible words of that song.

Alas! Perhaps the very sadness of her voice as she sang was due to a presentiment of her own destiny? One night she too, like Robin's wife, would lie awake and call to mind the sorrows of her life—dear memories that wavered in the darkness round the bed, so silent now. . . . No! It was impossible! Such horror could not, could not come to pass. She was despicable, she was vile, he would save her from herself. Did he love her, or did he not? He did not know. But what he did know was that the threads of their lives were so interwoven that she could not leave him now without rending the very substance of their souls; she was a part of him. It was not happiness he looked for now. It was she, it was Catherine alone, whom he saw as the end of all effort; and her name was so indissolubly mingled with his life that in speaking it he seemed to be expressing a part of himself, the gentler and better part. Behind the mask that hid her true countenance was someone he alone had yet divined, someone

of whom she herself was yet ignorant, the real Catherine for whom he waited.

As a pool whose waters have been ruffled will slowly recover its limpidity and begin once more to reflect all the changing aspects of the sky, so to his anger succeeded an emotion of tenderness; and in this he found, as it were, the multitudinous image of his love, the elements of his patient and strong design. The first thing was to calm her, to soothe her, to restore her once more to herself . . . and he set about writing to her with the utmost tenderness. But the shock had been even ruder than he had imagined, and the persistent and painful memory of the alarm stayed with him like a warning. He must arm her for this unceasing struggle, for she alone could buy her victory, and all he could do was help as best he could; he could not act for her. It was for her to advance boldly, for her to be brave; it was for him to point out the perils. And the greatest of these came not from outside but from within herself. She could so easily start all unawares upon that imperceptible slope whose ending, concealed until the last, is the abyss. Only the little compromises of every day, the seemingly trivial concessions, the self-deceptions . . .—But the force of precept is doubled by example; he must show her this example in another, another who was nevertheless herself, in whom she would discover her true self . . . And with a haste which Catherine regarded now a little dubiously, wondering whether such precipitation

might not endanger success, he set to work again on the book that in truth he was writing for her alone and of which she herself was to be the prize.

After their sudden departure from the Breton village where they had been spending their holidays, Madame Rouves and her daughter returned to Saint-Vallier. It was Catherine's own life he lived now as he wrote of Jeanne Rouves, and his own fearfulness and tenderness for her dictated the words he should use; he had only to write them down. . . . Such sad dreams she had nowadays as night fell to the lamentations of the autumn wind in the branches of the trees, recalling the sighing of the waves and the evenings they had spent together! In the morning she awoke now to the sound of commands and the noise of soldiers exercising in the square below. She would lie and listen to the dull and rhythmic thudding of their boots in the mud, or, as the rhythm broke and changed, to orders shouted in a lifeless, weary, melancholy voice.

And how long were the days! Back again among her friends she somehow did not recover the old intimacies which only two months ago had filled her whole life; all that had been artificial in her friendships now showed plain. Indeed, she saw very little of her friends. Everything was boring and wearisome nowadays, though—walking, talking, even thinking. She spent hours on her bed, listless and hopeless. In the evening she dreamed over her piano.

Her heart ached with an immense sense of expectancy, and nothing could fill that void. She changed continually from depressed to hopeful, from a feverish need of distraction and pleasure to a desire for solitude. And, in the image of her whose path she had to follow, she was now turned in upon herself, absorbed by her own mystery; now, in despair of ever really finding her own identity, offering herself up to the whims of chance and accepting whatever that might bring, ready, like a violin in a stranger's hand, to play any tune, docile to express the finest shades of another's will or caprice.

Sometimes the memory of her love came back to her: vividly and in detail, or like a dream of the past or the future. But the summer holidays were coming round once more, and she began to hope that they might meet again: all her being seemed suspended in this new and dazzling hope. Nevertheless, when Madame Rouves told their friends at Saint-Guénolé that they would be spending their holidays elsewhere this year, and, with her usual duplicity, asked her daughter if she did not agree to this, Jeanne answered: "But of course."

At this new place they had no acquaintances, and Jeanne and her mother drew closer together. For a long time Madame Rouves had been worrying about the change that had come over her daughter; she put it down to the influence of one whom she regarded as having come into this life solely to destroy their peace

and happiness, and she now made every effort to regain the place from which she felt herself ousted. And gradually, thankful only to have done with suffering, Jeanne sank into a kind of contented apathy, shrinking from the slightest argument, ready to agree to everything without question, without reflection even, and turning panic-stricken from anything that might have roused her from her torpor.

Then, on her return to Saint-Vallier, she was confronted with a suitor. At first she refused him, of course; but in the end she gave her consent. But on the morning of her betrothal she was utterly taken aback when she was kissed by the man who was to have such rights over her, rights the very existence of which she had not even suspected; and she fled from the room where they had been left alone together, and, in the course of the subsequent scene with her mother, fainted away.

She was still in bed when a basket of white camellias was brought up to her with Monsieur Lagardenne's card and a request for news. And her mother's heart leapt for joy when, to her question of "What answer shall I give him?" she heard her daughter implicitly consenting to a marriage which for a moment had seemed imperilled:

"You can show him up if you like. I suppose he must be allowed to say good morning to his fiancée."

The horror of such a voluntary consent was not enough for Michel: it was necessary that the victim

herself should pronounce the words which should condemn her. And it was with a grimace of contempt, of rage, of disgust, that to Madame Rouves' welcome to her future son-in-law—"Our poor little patient would like to see you"—he added with a bursting heart words which he suddenly seemed to hear uttered by a familiar voice:

"Such a little bundle of nerves! You must take care of her, Monsieur."

Meanwhile a long letter came from Catherine bringing proof that in her own way she too had not been inactive but, although at a distance, had been sharing in his efforts. Recovered from the nervous crisis which at one time she had thought would engulf her, she had, it appeared, been struck by its peculiar violence, and had resolutely set about a self-examination by which she hoped to lay bare her very soul. Now she sent him her findings, as the highest tribute love could offer.

Such an examination, she wrote, had been extraordinarily difficult owing to the many incoherent emotions, feelings, and impressions at war within her. However, quite suddenly she had hit on one thing; namely, that in most things she was very much his inferior. And this discovery, contrary to expectation, had not distressed her at all. It had, on the contrary, made it easier for her to realize that she was passing through a phase of moral and intellectual transformation, aspiring to higher and nobler things, yet still too

much attached to the common clamour of humanity. Already she had experienced several of such crises; one when she was about eighteen, bringing with it a wave of acute scepticism; another, two years later, leaving her exaggeratedly optimistic and credulous. A third had been a phase of idealization. All these had contributed to the forging of her soul, the development of her mind.

"I feel very strongly that I am passing now through a period of transition, which will bring me finally face to face with life as it is. I know now that your mind is superior to mine, and I want to follow your lead. Could I say more than that? I have not yet been able to adopt all your opinions, but I want to make them mine. I have never been very good at disentangling my thoughts from my feelings, and you must help me in that. In you, dear husband, I have absolute confidence: I want to be truly your wife. And because of that you must do all you can to help me if my own strength is not enough to beat down all the barriers between your mind and mine. As for me, I promise to be humble and to put all my will, heart and mind into that effort."

There was still one point, however, in which she admitted to feeling a certain superiority. In the most charming way in the world she pointed out that his aesthetic sense was by no means all it might be. Indeed, it simply didn't exist; and it was obvious enough why they should always be at loggerheads over, for

instance, all questions to do with the drama in general and actors in particular—Michel, in his last letter, having raised this question afresh after several evenings spent at the Théâtre-Antoine.

Thus adroitly did she return once more to the old familiar argument, writing with a forced enthusiasm which revealed all too plainly the hopeless muddle-headedness of one dazzled by vulgar success and finding in that the glorified image of its own taste for the sham and the mythical: she wrote again, almost word for word, what she had already written on the subject on many previous occasions, eulogizing two popular actors of the day in terms so trite—"It is obvious how I admire them," she wrote—that he found it impossible to decide which he disliked most, her speedy defection from their new-found unity, or the pretentious assurance of the tones in which she announced it.

She wound up by saying that she did not really expect him to understand all this, since he had so little aesthetic appreciation. But he should try to develop it, for Art—she used a capital A for it—was a source of pleasure to her in which he would surely like to share. Meanwhile, in case she had not convinced him, and to cut short any further argument, she was at pains to make it clear that such mutual understanding must not involve any diminishing of their separate personalities. They must aim at understanding each other's ideas without invariably agreeing about everything. At this point she seemed to realize that she was con-

tradicting herself and that it would not be long before he pointed it out to her, so she brought her letter—that letter which had opened on such a note of security—abruptly to a close by avowing a sudden anxiety. She could have wept, she wrote. Why was she suddenly so sad? She did not know. . . . But her anxiety assumed a shape she had come by now to know very well, and unconsciously she revealed the emotion she was trying to conceal by the very pains she took to hide it.

“How old is your Marguerite Paumier?” she asked. “Do you see her often? Do you enjoy talking to her more than you do to me? Not that I’m the least bit jealous. I’m just interested in the girl. . . .”

Michel’s reply was everything she had feared, curt and brutal, and the more contemptuous in that his disappointment had been so great. But although she had previously wept at the thought of such a reply, when it actually arrived her own reaction surprised her: she positively welcomed it, challenging his phrases with a tartness that soon turned to something like spite. How had it been possible for him to write, for instance: “I could never bring myself to utter one word of love to a woman who admired Sarah Bernhardt?” He had better think twice, then, before saying he loved *her*! Perhaps, though, that didn’t come naturally to him anyway? Wasn’t it, moreover, the same as saying: “I love you; I would give my life for you. But, understand, my infinite love does not go so far as to let you admire Sarah Bernhardt. No, indeed!

If you do, then we must part!" So that was the kind of feeling their future life was to be founded upon! And she was asked to love more than all the world a man who could say such things, a man who could even conceive of an end to their love because some of their ideas were not identical, because her intelligence was unable to follow his in everything—or, at least, would not give way to his! Did he really love her more than anything else—yes or no? . . . And this time it was she who put the question to him.

And in her efforts to locate the real cause of their discord elsewhere than in herself, she hit on the idea that it was an outcome of her failure to keep herself sufficiently distant and aloof. In support of this conception she fell back on various aphorisms of the kind that women's magazines sandwich between recipes and astrological consultations: "A woman is only loved if she is worshipped. She must be and remain the Idol. On the day the Idol descends from her pedestal and becomes the mere human lover all is lost, or at least endangered." Again: "Those that reach towards the Idol will always have some gold at least upon their hands. . . ." She reproached him for loving her less since she had come to love him more. How his love had changed since the old days! Then he had said: "If you could only love me I would do anything, everything, you asked!" But which of them was it to-day that obeyed the other? If he would just stop to think for a moment: could he honestly say that

he had kept his promises, he who so often reproached her for not keeping hers?

And then, just as he was becoming exasperated beyond all measure by such inanities, there occurred a sudden unexpected word or two that redeemed them all, like those small pink daisies one sometimes discovers with touched astonishment in the black and sodden January earth:

“I write exactly as if I were talking to you; my heart dictates and I obey: it is my heart that speaks.”

MICHEL AND LAVARENNE now spent most of their evenings alone together, or with Marguerite Paumier, without bothering about Flandrin any more; but on Thursday afternoons, by old-established custom, all three still met at the Café de la Palette d'Or. And here would come others of their friends, sure of always finding them; and here too, at intervals, as though unwilling to waste any time over them but determined to keep in contact with the little group for what it might be worth to him, appeared a certain Robert Fageot, the son of a little chinaware agent in the faubourg Saint-Antoine, one of their old fellow-students of the Lycée Sully, and at one time the intimate friend of Lavarenne, although now they had drifted apart.

Fageot had early realized that he would have to rely upon his own efforts, and had shown himself practical when others of his age were still dreaming and spinning fantasies; avoiding alike the over-application which would have too deeply absorbed him and the dissipation which would have wasted his time, he had subjected life to a practical and appraising gaze, quite determined to discard all scruples, and regarding

unselfishness as one of those pleasant attributes of wealth forbidden the poor. Nobody knew how he had got there, for he wrapped himself about with impenetrable mystery simply to keep his methods to himself; but there he was, already on some kind of a footing in one of the evening papers, turning out little paragraphs of theatrical news and combining his new journalistic rôle with the less brilliant one of student of philosophy at the Lycée Sully. From time to time one even saw his signature below brief notices of the more popular authors of the day, nicely compounded of flattery and criticism. These often resulted (and he allowed himself to profit by Lavarenne's indiscreet tongue and have the news spread thus abroad) in a word of thanks, or a letter, or even a book with a flattering inscription—bare-faced sycophancy which caused Lavarenne to shrug his shoulders in ironic contempt, less for the writers who thus demeaned themselves than for the object of their flattery.

Fageot invariably turned up late at the café, somewhere about five o'clock, wearing the busy and preoccupied air of the man of affairs confronted with those idle beings whose time is their own. He had a shrivelled mouth which seemed to jeer from his beardless face, and the set of his shoulders somehow recalled the gait of an errand-boy dodging along a busy street with the erratic, hurried stride of his kind. He would shake hands ceremoniously all round; and one almost had the feeling that before sitting down he must be going to

heave his commercial traveller's bundle of cardboard boxes on to the table before them.

And in exactly the strident tones of a traveller extolling his latest toys or fancy goods he would cut into their conversation, retailing bits of news, enunciating aphorisms, or, if they were discussing a book, holding forth on it at length; but he was always less interested in great artists than in those ephemeral writers whom fashion, or some small talent, or sheer copiousness, had once made popular, or whose writings scandal had for a while made notorious, or the happy accident of a striking title, or merely one particular book, but whose fame had passed with the generation that admired them—men such as Albert Samain, Huysmans, Paul Adam, Abel Hermant. Sometimes amongst these ephemeral names some great name would crop up: a reference to Flaubert, an instancing of a tale of Maupassant's. But while the others dwelt always upon the mere effect produced, Michel would run his hand, as it were, over the drapery to see what it covered, and more often than not would find that it covered nothing. Nor in all the books they praised so highly did he ever find any solutions to the problems that were perplexing heart and mind alike. And thinking of the book he would so much have liked to read, the book which unconsciously he was writing himself since nobody else would write it, he would ask:

“But what is it trying to *prove*?”

Whereupon Fageot, tempering his lecture with a

little ironic chaff, would announce that the whole aim of a book was, precisely, to prove nothing—and would proceed to expound the doctrine of art for art's sake. Still unconvinced, Michel would attempt to make plain what he himself hardly saw clearly yet. But even as he pursued his idea the words to express it failed him; and by the time the words had come the idea itself would have vanished, or at least changed. He would hesitate, stop dead; and then suddenly words and idea would be recaptured simultaneously, and he would be carried away, marvelling, on the flood of his own eloquence—until suddenly again he would be checked in full flight, inexplicably dumb and blank before his opponents' exclamations and interruptions—a sensation so intolerable that to escape from it he himself would deliberately hand the others the advantage, and distort or exaggerate what he was trying to say, purposely turning the whole thing into farce: the argument would subside into a general laugh of satisfaction, and Fageot would inter it with a caustic phrase.

One evening when all four were thus talking together in the café they heard faint sounds outside, sounds which rapidly approached and grew into a recognizable uproar. They knew at once what it must be, leapt up and rushed madly outside just in time to see the column of demonstrators marching up the street towards them—a dark, compact mass, enveloped in its own clamour as in a cloud of noise, and advancing

as one down the middle of the street, with an effect of shouldering aside the busy streams of traffic. A rhythmic chant of "*Conspuez Zola!*" rose up into the night with a ring of youthful enthusiasm. But every now and then this brief, reiterated chanting ceased, and another, solitary cry arose, confused with the rhythm of all those feet trampling in rapid cadence on the wooden paving-blocks, a single, brutal cry, menacing and suddenly almost terrible:

"Vive l'armée! Vive l'armée! Vive l'armée."

Some feeling far deeper than mere opinion one way or the other touched them as they stood shivering silently there, watching that mob stream by, and less angered, perhaps, than deeply perturbed. At last Lavarenne, who for a moment had seemed to be trying to make up his mind, took a step forward and, secretly exalted by the thought of the show he was making, both to his friends and to himself, suddenly burst out with a cry of "*Vive Zola!*" Intended primarily for the benefit of those who stood in his immediate neighbourhood, his shout was in fact much louder than he meant it to be, and like an ill-aimed shot it struck the tail-end of the column, which had hardly yet passed by.

He had scarcely opened his mouth before some of the demonstrators broke away from the column and started running towards him; and soon he and Michel—the others had vanished—found themselves the centre of a yelling and rapidly increasing group. A

few yards off there was a lamp-post; Lavarenne retreated to it and got his back up against it. Then, drawing a revolver from his pocket—a special hip-pocket in the American style!—he flourished it at the surrounding crowd. At once the circle of assailants widened, and he was beginning to feel master of the situation when a newcomer elbowed his way through the little crowd, a short, bearded young fellow with the face of a fanatic, who pressed forward until his chest all but touched the weapon levelled at him. With blazing eyes fixed on Lavarenne he started taunting him, repeating endlessly in a sort of jeering refrain:

“Come on then, fire! Come on then, fire!”

Thus for a moment the crowd was treated to the curious spectacle of a prospective victim entreating his murderer to carry out his fell design, and the prospective murderer energetically refusing to do anything of the sort.

Meanwhile, however, other voices were heard among the hostile sniggers of the crowd; threats to call the police or to throw the Jew into the Seine: indeed, the situation was becoming nastier every moment. And all this time Michel was incessantly muttering to his friend that if he didn't look out he would be arrested for carrying prohibited firearms; and at length Lavarenne, extremely worried by now himself, under cover of a flood of words (words which were undoubtedly more like recriminations than menaces

now), adroitly slipped the offending object to Michel, who received it with considerable embarrassment.

Little by little the small crowd melted away. The less interested had already moved off, running to catch up with the main body of the column, which was marching steadily on. And at last, as though ashamed of wasting any more time on so paltry an enemy, Lavarenne's principal adversary betook himself off with a parting sarcasm, drawing the rest with him in his retreat. At once Lavarenne and Michel found themselves safe and sound once more in the usual throng of passers-by.

When they looked round for their companions they caught sight of Flandrin a little way off, peacefully smoking his pipe as he waited for them. But of Fageot there was no trace.

There was one moment of the day when Michel felt closer to Catherine than at any other time. This was the hour before dinner, between six and seven. He would have just come in after leaving Lavarenne, who would be calling for him again in two hours' time. His mother and sister would not yet be home. He would go and sit at the piano in the large, shadowy drawing-room, faintly illumined by the light of the street lamps outside, and as he played he could see over one shoulder the sharp line of light under his father's study door.

His fingers moving at random over the keys, one

melody would melt into another, and once again the unchanging memories thronged past him, each summoned from the darkness, familiar and distinct, at the first notes of its own tune. This was the song they had sung together on the long railway journey back from Royan; and he remembered that bewitching night together in the shadowy compartment with its shaded lamp, and the child-like docility and languor of her lips beneath the kisses he had stolen, with one eye on Madame de Laignes asleep in the opposite corner. He remembered, too, the arrival at the cold station, the omnibus sliding off over the slippery *pavé*, his misery at the thought of going back to college, and all his fears for a future which seemed as enigmatic as the morning mists. Another tune was inseparably associated with the time before his departure for Royan, when for an instant it had amazingly seemed good to be alive; that tune would always be luminous with hope for him. As though to fix for ever the memory of adolescence, the springtime of its words had taken on the shining radiance of a sky which had been bluer that year than ever before. Yet another tune, which he could never hear without recalling Saint-Guénolé and its hours of grief, seemed to hold in its melancholy the memory of so many vanished and forgotten moments that he had only to evoke them to taste again the bitterness of life as it had been then. Even the ballad of old Robin Gray had its place in this strange procession of images and sounds.

There was one song, however, to which in his melancholy he returned again and again: on its light cadences he was carried back at will from the present moment to that day so long ago when, before they had become friends, destiny brought them face to face and, with a sort of tender irony, made of their first hand-clasp an eternal symbol. It was a song she had sung one evening at Saint-Loup, after the dinner at which he had sat beside her—he still a boy in short trousers, and she already quite a young lady. After that, since she was always asked to sing it, and enjoyed doing so, sure of success, it was invariably included among the two or three other little songs of her repertoire: a foolish little song, full of flowers and stars; but in its heart it had lived on as something beautiful.

He saw her again, standing by the piano in her white dress, her eyes beneath their lowered lids fixed, it would seem, less on the music than on some mysterious inner vision which touched her faint smile with mockery and wonder. And as in memory he watched her singing he seemed to draw very close to her, and absence gradually lost its torturing reality; until suddenly, at either end of this dark corridor of countless days of separation, the light became so bright that past and present were merged into one time and place, and it was as though they had never been parted.

The last high notes of the song ended on one final, higher, note. As a bird alighting hovers for a moment with outstretched wings and delicate feet before

coming to earth with exquisite lightness, so the voice mounted, mounted, remained an instant poised, and sank in a single swoop; and Catherine, as though emerging from a dream in which she had never quite been lost, smiled as she gave her little bow and crossed the room to sit at his side again.

In spite of their love, in spite of all his efforts, what had once been reality itself was now no more than a memory of something that might never have been; and in bitter revolt against the utter frustration of the emotion that dominated his whole life, he returned once more, in a kind of desperation, to the problem he had never yet been able to solve. Setting out the facts in the manner of an equation he examined them afresh: he wanted to see Catherine; no absolute prohibition had been imposed; he had, then, only to act. All he had to do was catch the train at the Gare de l'Est immediately after dinner. Three hours later, as the hands of the big drawing-room clock touched ten, he would be knocking at her door, not clandestinely this time, but openly, and a moment later they would be together. . . . And yet this solution, the logical outcome of a process of reasoning, was impossible; and this impossibility was all the more inconceivable since it did not at all derive from those pitiless super-human laws to which all men are subject, but from obstacles so slight as to seem imponderable, that yet were indestructible and, for all their human origin, as substantial as the work of destiny itself.

Had Catherine been as bold and determined as himself they might perhaps have succeeded. Alone, or with a friend to help her, she might have managed to meet him on a long bicycle ride. She said such a plan was not feasible. Why not? For a long time she had pretended it was impossible for her to write to him; nothing had happened to make it possible, yet she wrote now.

One evening as he was playing thus, tormented with the need for action and racking his brains to hit on some expedient, it suddenly occurred to him that there was one thing at least that he could do, and immediately: he could tell his father of his determination to marry Catherine. But scarcely had the idea come into his head than he was filled with revulsion at the thought of the distressing interview that must ensue. He heard in imagination the creak of the door as he opened it, his own first words of explanation; he saw his father's astonishment, astonishment so deep that he actually might not understand at first, and would oblige him to repeat what he had already said once with so much difficulty. . . . But having so often reproached Catherine for her faint-heartedness the last thing he wanted was to lay himself open to a similar charge; and, frightened as he was of what he was about to do, he knew very well that he would not draw back now. . . . Even so, he allowed himself a moment's grace for reflection and, astonished to find them so short, ran once more through the succession of tunes

which were the milestones of his path and which had brought him today to that closed study door behind which lay a possible new development of his destiny.

Meanwhile the tunes unfolded beneath his fingers with so languishing a progress that he had a sudden fear that his father might have divined the pianist's own distress and hesitation in such wavering playing, and would see through the first few non-committal words of the coming interview. The moment for action had come. He could put it off no longer. He gave himself to the end of the bar and then, abruptly shutting the piano, got up, and, his throat dry, his heart pounding, walked over to the door, took the knob in his trembling hand, turned it, and walked in.

Monsieur Varambaud was working, his head bent over his papers, a cigarette between his fingers. The scattered papers and heavy, open volumes on his desk lay in a pool of vivid light cast by the reading-lamp with its enamelled shade, white within and green without; the remainder of the room was shadowed restfully. Michel sat down in the big arm-chair on the far side of the desk. He felt physically oppressed by the weight of an immense embarrassment—less at the thought of the subject he was about to broach than at the necessity of breaking the silence with a blunt announcement. He sat there breathing deeply and quietly. And suddenly what was in his mind seemed to burst from him of its own accord, and he heard himself

saying, with extraordinary calmness and in a perfectly quiet, level voice, almost in his normal tones:

"I suppose Mother's told you I want to marry Catherine?"

Taken unawares by this abrupt question flung at him in the midst of his work, Monsieur Varambaud, who would certainly have given his opinion if he had had one, instinctively played for time:

"No," he said (but his very lack of astonishment betrayed him); "your mother has said nothing to me."

"Well, now you do know," pursued Michel, "what do you think of it?"

This time Monsieur Varambaud laid down his pen. His face lit up with a kindly smile that concealed the secret shrinking of a timid nature from any downright situation. With the same calm air and in a tone of cautious kindness which made him suddenly appear much older and his son much younger, he replied:

"My dear boy, now you're asking me a question I cannot possibly answer. Work; make yourself independent; and then we'll see. . . ."

But Michel, who wanted a categorical answer, persisted:

"But supposing I do become independent? . . ."

"As I say—when that happens we'll see."

Michel tried again:

"But supposing . . ."

With a sudden change of tone, Monsieur Varambaud cut him short impatiently:

"That will do for the present! Please leave me now. I have work to do."

Michel said no more, as exhausted as if after physical exertion; but his mind was calmer now that he had accomplished what he had set out to do: at least the matter had been brought into the open; the first round was won. Nevertheless, there was still much to be done. He must get a definite answer one way or the other, and settle many practical details.

Next day as there was no court his father was at home all day. After lunch Michel followed him into his study and at once re-opened the attack.

"Have you thought about what I said yesterday?"

It was as though all bitterness had been melted away by yesterday's preliminary skirmish; Michel's question was entirely calm, and so was Monsieur Varambaud's reply:

"I can only repeat what I said yesterday. Work! Then you will be your own master and in a position to do what you wish—if when that time comes you are still of the same mind. But I wonder if you will be? It's early days yet to think of mortgaging your whole future life!"

Michel smiled ironically to see petty wisdom pitted against something which he knew was stronger than either of them, stronger than his own will, stronger even than his own desire; that was indeed the voice of Fate.

"I know I shall never change."

But even as he uttered these words he realized how they would strike his father and felt all their apparent insufficiency and naïveté.

"Very well," Monsieur Varambaud replied. "But, granted that much, it is now up to you to put yourself in a position to satisfy your own desires. Let me tell you, however, that you don't seem to be going about it in at all the right way. After failing in your exam you ought to have started working again harder than ever; but in fact you've done nothing at all."

"Oh no, I'm working now!"

"May I ask what at?"

With a sort of shame at having to use words so often the expression of mere impotence and mediocrity, Michel announced:

"I am writing a novel."

Monsieur Varambaud might have smiled, but he received this confidence in all seriousness, with only a certain very sensible and kindly solicitude. But in spite of himself his words betrayed a little affectionate reproach:

"I could not know that. You never tell me what you are doing. Even so, we have to assume that your novel will be a success, and, if it is a success, that it will also be a source of income to you. . . . My dear boy, I'm afraid you have chosen a difficult career."

But a fear of another kind had crossed Michel's mind.

"Anyway, I'm not entirely penniless? You'll allow

me something? At least as much as I cost you at home?"

"Of course. But it won't amount to a great deal, I'm afraid. . . . Furthermore," Monsieur Varambaud continued, after a pause during which he ran through all the objections he had been able to rake up since the day before, "furthermore—you say you want to marry Catherine: very good. But what about her? Are you quite certain of her feelings?"

And anxious that his son should know the worst, if by any chance he did not know it already:

"You know, of course, that before this she was to have married someone called Claude de Brionne . . .?"

Embarrassed less by the name itself than by the sound of it on his father's lips, Michel answered almost dryly:

"Oh yes, I know all that."

" . . . And that at one time she was deeply attached to him? Madame de Laignes herself spoke to me about it. Consent was withheld because, like you, he had no position; and Catherine showed herself very obstinate, making regular scenes with her mother and swearing she would marry him in spite of everything."

Realizing how impossible it would be to explain what in any case his father would have great difficulty in grasping, Michel preferred to cut the discussion short, although by doing so he would implicitly be lending retrospective importance to something that had never had it. He said:

"That's all over now."

"There is one other thing, if you haven't already thought of it: you know, I suppose" (Michel smiled bitterly) "that she is older than you. That may amount to no more than a slight awkwardness now, but later on it may well prove a source of unhappiness."

Michel's heart was heavy, but he answered firmly:

"It is a great misfortune, but it can't be helped."

"Again, are you quite sure you're not simply rather dazzled by her? Catherine is a very charming girl; I shouldn't dream of suggesting anything else. But she has, perhaps, less of true beauty than what is called *la beauté du diable*; and that soon fades. You see, it is my duty to point out all the difficulties of the path you have chosen. And, as I see it, hers is a nature that may well prove to be less amenable than one might suppose. Oh, I agree that with us she is invariably charming; but, I assure you, I heard her answer her mother one day in tones that revealed a very different Catherine."

All this advice rather missed fire, however, since the thing had already happened so long ago; and this gave it a curious air of futility and unreality, even of falsity, and emphasized the disproportion between the words and the underlying intent. Besides, there was nothing his father said which had not at one time or another already occurred to him, and not a single danger among the many sedulously indicated that he had not already frankly faced. He was irritated, too,

by his father's judgement of Catherine's character, not so much because of its unfavourableness as because it seemed to him entirely false. Unfair and almost absurd as he considered it, it none the less aroused a vague uneasiness in him, and to evade this he returned to the only point that really interested him, and concluded abruptly:

"However—if my novel is a success you won't oppose our marriage?"

"If you think it necessary for your happiness, no. But it will be with a heavy heart; for I cannot help feeling that you will be laying up great unhappiness for yourself."

"But you will help me?"

"Yes; but, as I say, it won't be much."

"How much? Two thousand francs?"

"Something like that, I suppose. But don't delude yourself. Remember, you are mortgaging your whole life. . . ."

And, returning to the fear he had once already expressed:

"You must first of all be absolutely certain that Catherine is as serious about this marriage as you are."

With assurance Michel answered:

"She is as determined as I am."

Monsieur Varambaud continued:

"You may believe that; but you can't be certain. It is a long time since you saw her last. She may have changed. Perhaps . . ."

But Michel, with magnificent coolness, interrupted his father:

"Oh no, not so very long. I saw her less than a month ago. . . ."

Monsieur Varambaud looked up:

"In Paris?"

"No, at Saint-Loup."

"With the knowledge of Madame de Laignes?"

"No, I saw her one night."

Monsieur Varambaud started, pushed back his chair, and gazed attentively at his son over his spectacles:

"One night?"

"Yes," said Michel. "Madame de Laignes does not wish me to see Catherine during the day, so I went at night."

"You must have been mad!" Monsieur Varambaud exclaimed. "What on earth possessed you? You might have been discovered, you might have been shot for a burglar! Think how Catherine would have been compromised! Besides, you might have been badly hurt, or even killed. . . ."

"I know all that, and I would much rather have gone in broad daylight and rung the bell in the proper way. But it's not my fault if I have to run such risks; it's the fault of those who drive me to it."

At these words Monsieur Varambaud shrugged his shoulders impatiently:

"You will at least agree that it was neither right nor proper. Nobody does that sort of thing."

And, picking up the sheet upon which he had been writing when Michel had entered, he suddenly raised it to the level of his eyes and ostentatiously started reading, muttering the words over to himself in an endeavour to keep his attention from wandering, which it obviously was.

Michel saw that the interview was closed.

The words he wanted would not come, and with a sudden coldness that was far from expressing the affectionate gratitude he really felt, he said merely:

"Thank you very much."

And he got up and went out, his heart eased of the burden which was now his father's.

TOWARDS THE END of December Lavarenne failed for several evenings running to appear at their usual rendezvous, and later Michel learnt by chance that he was meeting Marguerite Paumier alone. Soon Lavarenne himself no longer made a secret of it. But although he preserved the utmost reticence about what they did with their time together, he was willing enough to talk about his own feelings. In short, he was full of the idea of marriage; but, by a curious parallel, precisely the obstacles which Michel had to face also confronted him. There was the question of money, the question of military service, and, finally, since she was some years his senior, the cruel question of age. He was constantly expounding his hesitancies and fears and would expatiate on his perplexities without ever seeming able to decide one way or the other—until one day, as they were talking of other things, he suddenly announced, in tones which he strove to keep casual:

“Oh, by the way, we’ve been engaged, you know, since last night!”

Michel at once broke out into a boisterous demonstration of delight, the more exuberant since he was

so astonished—but they were both, Michel probably as much as Lavarenne, slightly embarrassed by the insincerity of all this display of emotion.

Michel in his imagination already saw himself married to Catherine and continuing with Lavarenne, also married, their life of close and comradely intimacy—a marriage of the future, as it were, free of all the conventions and prejudices of the world, from which they stood proudly apart. Alas! all that was needed for the fulfilment of this beautiful dream was for Catherine to will it too; everything depended upon her courage, everything was at the mercy of her cowardice. And he was suddenly filled with acute regret at the thought that what had here taken place beneath his eyes so simply, so openly, could only be attained in his case by terrific efforts and a tortuous path; and he allowed himself to play with the idea that a kinder fate might have provided him too with such a wife, and that Lavarenne had been specially favoured.

All three were to meet again that evening—December 31st—to see the old year out together. Himself the first to arrive at their meeting-place at the foot of the monument in the place de la République, Michel saw them come up together arm in arm, faintly embarrassed, and with a touch of unaccustomed ceremony. Uncertain how to refer to their engagement, Michel substituted warm good wishes for the new year for what he had originally intended to say, and Lavarenne returned a greeting whose meaning, although he mentioned no

name, was obvious. To this Marguerite Paumier at once added her own; her choice of pronoun was an open confession of the fact that everything was already common to her and the future companion of her life:

"Our compliments," she said, "and our best wishes to you and Catherine!"

Touched as he was, Michel was suddenly horribly shocked to hear that name on her lips.

They had determined to keep their engagement a secret for some time to come, for Lavarenne was afraid of family opposition, which, since he was a minor, it would be impossible for him to ignore. As for her, she knew no objection would be raised; but although she considered it would be pointless to announce her plans in advance there was no faintest sign that she desired to conceal them at all. Several times, indeed, she took Lavarenne to a café where her brother, a professional violinist, played in the orchestra. They would choose a table in the neighbourhood of the dais where the musicians sat; and although they never exchanged a word, the three young people, on entering and on leaving, would exchange a brief and serious nod of recognition.

Although, by bravely facing their consequences, Lavarenne had overcome such difficulties as depended upon himself, the money problem still remained. At one time he had only talked to Michel about this side of the question; but nowadays, since there was no longer any need to try and impress her, he referred to

it openly in front of Marguerite Paumier, candidly laying bare the risks of the situation she was to share. Money he must have, and at once; but how? And he would enumerate his various talents. He had them all—which was as much as to say, he remarked indifferently, as though speaking of a third person and not of himself, that he had none. So obviously he would have to do something rather off the beaten track. And he launched out into all manner of madcap schemes, each different from the last and mostly derived from books; but all invariably directed to achieving a speedy and spectacular success—of which he seemed to have no very clear idea save that it must produce a great effect on everyone else and make him very much envied. . . . The best thing, he thought, would be to go straight to Monaco. And to show that he had already studied the subject he expatiated on the nature of roulette and trente-et-quarante and on doubles and martin-gales. He knew all about the d'Alembert system and discussed it at some length, but himself preferred the simpler and cruder system of always doubling your stake. You needed a lot of money to do that, however. Therefore, since the end justifies the means, he proposed to pilfer his parents' till. As a rule this contained little enough, but on the day before certain bills fell due he could count on finding some thirty thousand francs. The drawer was never locked, or, if it was, the lock was of the feeblest kind, and the general disorder that reigned in the household, and the complete absence

of any system of accountancy, had already enabled him to abstract small sums. This time he would take all he could lay hands on. He would slip away one night; and next evening all would be over—he would have lost everything, or he would have broken the bank.

“And if you do lose everything?” Michel queried, less because he disapproved of the means than because he doubted its efficacy. And he advised his friend to write a book rather than do that; to give himself—in the phrase of the day—to literature.

But Lavarenne had no illusions on that score and quickly brought him down to earth. Literature! he exclaimed, and shrugged his shoulders with a grunt of contempt. One went in either for art or for money. If it was for art, then the sooner you gave up all thought of gain the better; and if it was for money, then you sank at once to the level of a Fageot. And he didn’t make so much at it, anyway. On that sort of reckoning it was better by far to sell petrol or pigs like the inhabitants of Philadelphia or Chicago. At least one had the chance of becoming a millionaire! And he cited Rockefeller and Pierpont Morgan, so dazzled by the magnitude of their success that he never thought for a moment of the tremendous efforts on which that success was based; he described their Fifth Avenue palaces, their yachts and special trains, with such a contemptuous air of pity for those unfortunates who did not enjoy such advantages that you would have thought he possessed them himself—or that he was

trying to arouse the envy of others in order to stifle his own.

Michel, reduced to the rôle of confidant in the shadow of these two first leads, managed to recover all his old importance when Zola came to be prosecuted for his letter to the President of the Republic. Thanks to a friend of his father's, a lawyer who was engaged in the trial, he was able to attend the sittings of the assize—a most extraordinary favour, denied all who had not access to the very highest influence and often refused even the most eminent personages. To the flood of applications that poured in, the President, Delegorgue, part of whose duties involved policing the court, replied that having already distributed more tickets than the court held seats he could not send out even one more. But on the very morning that the trial opened people were still besieging him, and he was still assigning places—submerged in the welter of frenzied curiosity that had spread from Paris through the whole of France, dividing the country into opposing parties, and even now presaging the storm to come in the way it hammered on those closed doors behind which the first act of the drama was due to begin.

About eleven o'clock on that morning, then, Michel arrived at the Palais de Justice with his father, who was going to his own court and before whom the successive barriers of police and Municipal Guards

(a half company of these, armed and complete with drummer, was ostentatiously stationed at the foot of the Tour de l'Horloge) opened readily. In the Boulevard du Palais a muttering crowd was already making any progress difficult, but Monsieur Varambaud avoided this and went straight to his office on the second floor of the Tour d'Argent by a quayside passage specially reserved for magistrates. Almost at once the lawyer who was to take Michel into court appeared. Without even entering the room he exchanged a few rapid words from the doorway with Monsieur Varambaud, hastily turned about, and made for the Salle des Pas-Perdus, where Michel, by no means unexcited, followed him.

Animated enough usually, the hall was now empty; and in place of the usual babel of voices there was nothing to be heard now but the distant muffled clamour of the crowd outside, massed against the gates of the Cour de Mai, and the hurried footsteps within of those who, singly or in groups of twos and threes, hurried across the hall to the Galerie Mercière with an air of feverish anticipation; the entrance to this was already barred by a movable barrier with a Municipal Guard and a Palace Guard stationed beside it.

After crossing this, ascending a staircase, and traversing several further halls, they reached the far end of the Hall of Assize; keeping close to his guide Michel edged past the dozen or so women who were seated packed closely together along that dim and

very narrow little gangway which forms a sort of shallow partition along one wall of the court.

Although the doors were not yet opened to the public there were already perhaps some five times more spectators than the hall could reasonably hold—all packed together in an atmosphere that was already stifling, the multitude of separate conversations merging together in an undulating roar whose confused vibrations seemed to include the elements of some unknown and dreadful force. Many of the spectators were standing, packed into the corners. Friends called and signalled to one another across the hall. In the midst of all the bare or still covered heads was a fluttering of feminine headgear. And here and there the brilliance of an officer's uniform contrasted with the black gowns of the lawyers. Overflowing into the *prétoire* itself and sitting at the very feet of their seniors who were arguing noisily with much swooping of flowing sleeves, the youngest licentiates, like children at a party, sat unceremoniously on the floor, cross-legged in the Turkish manner. Some—but these had plainly been reading *Notre-Dame de Paris* and had memories of Jehan Frollo—had climbed up on to the window-sills, from which eminences they dominated the crowd with dangling legs.

At the back of the Court itself the three rows of benches reserved for the magistrates were all occupied. And it was with difficulty that Michel, for all his slimness, managed to squeeze himself into a minute

space on one of the benches which stood a little to one side by the desk of the clerk of the court.

And all the time people kept on coming in. Sometimes a chair would appear above the heads of the crush, carried at arm's length above some well-known politician, whose name would be whispered on all sides, or a fashionably dressed woman, and these, with the help of the usher, would find their way with difficulty through the crowd to their seats in the front row. In the press seats, augmented for the occasion by the addition of the dock itself—for Zola, as though acquitted in advance, was to sit at the bar of the court with his own counsel—certain of the legal reporters were already jotting down their impressions of the scene, never raising their eyes as they rapidly covered the topmost sheet of the wad of papers on their knees, each of which, torn off as soon as it was filled, would then be passed from hand to hand to the witnesses' entrance, where someone would be waiting to carry it off at once.

At last the jurymen made their entrance; and they were soon followed by counsel and the two accused, Zola and the editor of *l'Aurore*. Then the usher's voice made itself heard, there was silence, the heads which were still covered were bared, everybody rose, and, in a little rush, with an air of myopic hesitancy, the members of the Bench came in, one behind the other, and subsided into their arm-chairs, only there seeming to recover their proper majesty.

At once the President, raising his eyes, caught sight of the licentiates packed into the embrasures of the windows and immediately ordered their removal. With the greatest difficulty the doors at the end of the court were opened to the public. And then the trial began in all its turmoil of hissings, applause, calls to order—a sort of perpetual duel between counsel for the defence, Labori, with his fiery outbursts, and the President, Delegorgue, with his dry and reiterated “Question not allowed”—a remark which was unfailingly greeted with protests from one part of the audience every time it occurred, and made Michel, reduced to silence by virtue of the privileged position he occupied, boil with indignation.

Several times during the calling of the witnesses a young man who looked like an officer in civilian clothes had succeeded in slipping behind the Bench to Michel’s immediate neighbour, an elderly man with a sweeping moustache and an earnest, serious, obstinate look about him. Michel heard him addressed as “General”; he was handed a folded note; the other, having read it, said something in an undertone. And, the general’s name being suddenly pronounced, Michel realized, flattered as well as horrified, that he was sitting next to a general whose crimes were daily denounced by *l’Aurore*. For a moment he wondered if he were not in the act of surprising some dark new plot on the part of the General Staff. And it was only a certain hesitation at having to base his statement on such slight

evidence that kept him from calling at the office that very evening to impart his suspicions to *l'Aurore* itself.

At about four o'clock the court adjourned. It was like the fall of the curtain for the interval of a play; everyone immediately got up and began walking about, and the general constraint gave way to a sort of enthusiastic uproar. The *prétoire* itself was overrun by people coming and going, exchanging greetings, shaking hands. Lively conversations sprang up on every side. Ladies produced discreet little packages of sweets and handed them round amongst themselves. Sometimes one or another would offer the box with a ripple of amused laughter to the gentleman who had come to greet her, for all the world as he would have come to her box at the play.

Michel, divided between fear of losing his place and a desire to see the principal actors in the drama close to, went down into the *prétoire* himself. Almost at once the group which had been clustering round Zola broke up, and Michel found himself face to face with his hero. His heart swelled with admiration and reverence as he gazed upon this man who, he felt, was opposing infamy with such splendid courage and who had dauntlessly taken upon himself, in so noble a cause, the burden of so much hatred; he gazed up at him boldly with the devouring curiosity with which one might contemplate the man who is to figure as a hero in the pages of history.

Émile Zola stood there motionless, his bilious-looking face framed in its closely trimmed beard and given a fixed expression of bitterness by the deep creases about his mouth; his eyes blinked a little behind the lenses of his glasses as he gazed out over all that multitude: in his correct new clothes, his watch-chain looped across the waist-coat which showed between the edges of his neat black jacket, he looked as bourgeois as any magistrate or high official. With his gloved hand (the glove was of a thick and somewhat reddish skin) he would from time to time convey a ham-roll to his mouth . . . he before whom so many people had posed, now in his turn, and all unconsciously, posed before this youth, as solitary among all those people as himself, who, without knowing when or how, yet knew that one day he would have to recreate the times in which he had lived, and now engraved this scene upon his memory.

After the first day it had been discovered that some of the Palace Guards, using an underground passage normally closed, had, for a consideration, managed to smuggle into court a number of the curious who had been unable to secure cards of admission (to such an extent, indeed, that the greater number of those who actually had cards could not be admitted for lack of room); on the second day, therefore, more stringent precautions were taken and the policing of the hall was more rigorous. Michel was obliged to abandon his seat for another, much farther away, among the general

public who were fairly encircled by Municipal Guards stationed at either end of every bench, in *kepis* with the chin-straps down, that any disturbance might be dealt with as soon as it occurred.

From the first it was apparent that public excitement was even greater than on the previous day. The President was plainly nervous, the defence almost aggressive; but in spite of his bias towards the cause at stake it seemed to Michel that Labori, when pulled up short by some new piece of evidence, was substituting rhetoric for reasoning and that he had more brilliance than logic. At one moment, even, he pretended to throw in his hand. And that great blond figure leaning towards the jury, fists upraised, eyes glaring, dominated the adverse mutterings of the crowd, now attacking the prosecution, now belabouring a witness; until at last, when the witness had been dismissed, and the small dry voice of the President could be heard in the momentary calm threatening to clear the court, Labori would sit down noisily, flapping a great white handkerchief as he mopped his damp forehead and the fringe of already greying blond hair that tumbled into his eyes.

Meanwhile the fight became more furious. Protestations and mutterings from one party in court were immediately drowned by applause from the other (if provocation were needed it was enough for Labori to raise his voice and utter those words which since the first beginnings of the affair had automatically

unleashed wild enthusiasm: Enlightenment, Justice, Truth!).

Thrust this time into the ranks of the general public, Michel joined in with noisy enthusiasm. But suddenly, in the midst of his transports, and with appalling unexpectedness, he was brought to earth: a hand seized the scruff of his neck and a furious voice shouted out behind him:

"Out with him! Guard, throw him out!"

Turning round he realized with stupefaction that this was meant for no one else but him, and that the order came from an officer sitting in the public seats. When he saw the guard at the end of his row get up and beckon to him his fury knew no bounds. For a moment he thought of protesting. But at the thought that if he were taken before the Court he would be recognized he gave way, edged past the neighbours who had just been applauding with him, but who now permitted his expulsion without a word of protest, and made his way to the witnesses' door: it closed abruptly behind him, shutting out the tumult of the hall, and, completely crestfallen, swallowing his shame and his rage, he found himself in a small deserted corridor which led him at last, without his meeting a soul, to the Galerie Marchande, by which he left the Palais.

In the space of a night all that had so exclusively filled his mind the day before suddenly lost interest

for him; and annoyed with himself for having been caught up in an agitation which seemed the more futile the farther he left it behind, he returned once more to his interrupted task—finding precisely where he had left her that immobile and silent figure who would come to life again beneath the point of his pen and return to face her destiny.

As his father now knew all about his writing he need no longer use his own cold room but went every afternoon and worked with him. If he experienced something rather like an embarrassed shyness when it came to arranging beneath his father's very eyes the deepest emotions of his own heart, he felt on the other hand a certain confused satisfaction in having him there, as it were associated with his work and perhaps even, he thought, the more inclined thereby to take his side, since he could now watch the actual working-out of the plan that was to lead to fame and thence to that goal towards which, more clearly than any words, the mere movement of his hand across the page showed that he never ceased to aspire. He had brought down from his own room his little black wooden table, and this was now installed to the right of the fireplace, where a stove burned silently. His table was placed right up under the shelves containing volumes on jurisprudence, and their irregular red line was continually before his eyes as he started to work. For a moment, watching his father drafting a judgement so close beside him, he had to wrestle with the difficulty of

collecting his ideas in an atmosphere of work of such a different kind. But at last the ideas came, submissively at first, then suddenly imperious: and soon, racked with grief, despair and rage, everything was forgotten in the horror of the adventure whose twistings he seemed less to imagine than to follow blindfold.

Jeanne Rouves was to be married very soon. Had he not himself witnessed just such vacillations, just such feebleness of spirit—a feebleness whose only answer to attack is a convulsion of despair, whose only defence against hostility is an attempt to disarm it by exposing its own wounds and baring its bosom to fresh blows?—How steep the slope after the first false step! Already the marriage contract was drawn up, already it was the wedding eve. Yes, she appeared to him very much as he had anticipated, on that lonely evening. There was Jeanne Rouves, in her room: there, carefully spread out over the back of an arm-chair, was her wedding-dress, and there, near the door, the trunk that was already packed. And seated at her writing-desk, stirring memories at random with the papers heaping up upon her knees, she looked back, perhaps without daring to gaze at it directly, over the life that stretched out behind her in its final immobility, like a mirror in which for the last time it was given to her to recognize herself.

But her mother, knocking on the wall, called out affectionately: “You’ll be so tired to-morrow!” And

she gathered up the papers by handful and noiselessly threw into the dying fire that pile of memories that had once been hers but must never now be thought of again.

Her sleep was feverish, disturbed by sudden fears and nightmares. And when at last she opened her eyes somebody was turning the handle of her door. It was her mother come to wake her.

And from then on the hours flew by with an extraordinary swiftness. Over her face she pulled down the great white veil; the carriages arrived. The first stop was at the *Mairie*; then to the cathedral—there, on the other side of the square, just opposite her own house! And when she returned there was a stranger in her carriage and she was alone with him.

The sky itself that day had been lowering and gloomy, night had seemed to come on before its time: so, too quickly, came the dinner, the ball, the departure. For one moment—such a moment Michel knew would inevitably come—the abyss towards which she had been imperceptibly sliding opened beneath her horrified eyes. She shrank back, she pleaded with her mother, but it was too late; and she felt too weak, too inert, to resist any more.

Once again she entered a carriage. Where was it going to take her? Was this really the same station from which in other days she had so often joyously set forth? Then the train whistled—it would take her from Saint-Loup to Paris, as it had taken Michel from

Paris to Saint-Loup on that other night when he had come to see her from whom they kept him apart—and she in her turn was swept towards her destiny.

At last, still in this strange dream, she suddenly found herself in an unknown house, alone in a room with a large double bed. She undressed and went to bed; someone knocked on the door and entered the room.

Ah, with what frightful joy, then, with what release of pent-up emotions, did he who for so long had had to watch all this with mute anguish at last intervene! And for the first time, perhaps, this drama being played out in a lonely room from which even those who had chiefly contrived it were barred and must await the issue elsewhere, fondly compassionate—for the first time this drama was interrupted. By an act of mercy of which Michel was the instrument she at last understood—this living heroine made up of two living hearts, one leading and one led, both seeing in her the token of their joint destiny—she at last understood the nature of the abyss into which she had fallen: and the seed that love had planted in that timid heart in by-gone days now burst into life, stronger than terror, stronger than obedience, stronger even than the instinctive submission of ignorant flesh.

She escaped from that bed, and the last scene of the drama began, a scene which betrayed the influence on Michel both of *La Révolte* and of a very celebrated Scandinavian play which Catherine had made him

read: but if such influence was like the grain of leaven the paste at least was of his own kneading, and indeed this part of the book, in comparison with what had gone before, seemed of an altogether higher quality, for it was love that drove him to treat of this problem of marriage, not hopes of literary fame, and all his earnest meditations on the subject were directed solely to warning and protecting from herself her whom he loved, so that what he wrote was indeed heart-felt.

As unyielding, then, to the pleadings of the man to whom she had been handed over as she was to his threats and arguments—for she had learned at last, but at what a price! the meaning and necessity of steadfast courage—she fled.

It was about two o'clock one afternoon, with his father busily working beside him, that Michel wrote the last pages of his book. His mother, who was just going out, suddenly burst in, noisy and hurried as ever and jingling her keys. With a hasty word or two to his father she was gone as quickly as she had come. Her footsteps sounded for a moment in the hall; then the door of the flat was slammed, and immediately silence settled down on the house and a comfortable feeling that nothing would disturb it now till evening.

Deep was the clamour of those urgent voices within him, whose message he was charged to deliver: but there arose now a mightier inspiration which drew from his soul a new note.

Jeanne Rouves had gained the street: dawn was breaking and she did not know which way to turn, where to go, what shelter to seek, so racked with terror and despair now that her anguish infected even him who had inflicted it upon her. . . . Which was reality? And who, for that, was he? Lost in this uncertain flux of time and space he sought himself and sought in vain. He could not fathom the living mystery of that self that is a mere point of consciousness ceaselessly undergoing change, ceaselessly modified by that unnamed something whose conflicting elements it seems the task of our destiny to isolate; but the sense of his own individuality returned in full force when it came to suffering. That indeed is the only human certitude, which no one can deny, which, far from revealing us to ourselves, only thrusts us more upon ourselves, and which, stronger than life itself (whose enchantments man can rebuff), is the pin that holds conscience in its painful and humble place. All that he had suffered, all that he was still suffering, all that to-morrow he must yet suffer, was merged together into one single suffering in which innumerable groans were drowned. To feed this fiery furnace he cast into it pell-mell all his doubts, his hesitations, his remorse, his self-disgust and despair of others, his hatred and pity of life. Such dark clouds of smoke wreathed up as nearly blinded him and made him think all light had gone for ever from the world; but suddenly, in a flash, without warning, in the appointed heart of such

despair, the shades dispersed and the universe was changed.

His whole being was flooded now with ineffable joy, without hope as without regret, strange and new and seemingly eternal since it took no account of the morrow—the marvellous fullness of a soul at last in accord with everything around it, and conscious of its bliss with so gentle and humble a triumph that it was as though in that single moment he had received the final payment for his life and found every debt discharged. His eyes filled with tears.

But his soul was not strong enough to support such feeling for long—perhaps, indeed, because he recognized its nature. It dwindled, dwindled, softly dissolving like a wisp of cloud. And if far before him, at the end of his life, he glimpsed the final stage, he still had all that road to run—there must be patient effort, from minute to minute, from day to day, through failure and despair, before at last he should find again, on the threshold of mystery, that peace of which it had been given to him to glimpse the joys, and towards which he must guide Catherine.

OVER NIGHT, as it were, Michel suddenly found himself unoccupied (before starting anything else he had to get his novel conveyed to Catherine via Edmée Nollet, who was to be entrusted with it next time she was in Paris). He fell into a state of gloomy idleness—forgetting, because there had been no immediate result, the pledge it had been permitted him to receive, and the more cast down because of his previous exaltation.

There was nothing to hope for from day to day now but letters from Catherine, and those were melancholy mornings when the postman failed to bring one; he got up late, sometimes even (since they had *déjeuner* at half-past ten) coming straight down from bed to the table. His mother herself would only just have got out of bed, too, and like her he would appear in the dining-room still only half dressed—hair uncombed, jacket carelessly buttoned over his pyjamas. He would take his place at the table with a surly “Good morning” to his parents, unfold his napkin and tuck it into his collar, and then sit in silence with hands clasped on the edge of the table, waiting for his mother to serve him. From time to time as the meal progressed he

would emerge from his speechlessness with an unexpected remark, generally caustic or disgruntled, which Monsieur Varambaud, according to the state of his temper, received either in tolerant silence or with angry impatience.

"Such a maddening case to-day," he said one morning. "It's been heard twice already in the Sixth Court. . . . Entirely contradictory judgements!"

. "Mad, I suppose?" Michel insinuated.

Not in the least put out, Monsieur Varambaud answered as calmly as ever (and Michel asked himself in amazement whether his father really realized the enormity of what he was saying):

"Not at all. It's a very tricky matter. Probably different magistrates, too."

Or Madame Varambaud, full of an article she had just been reading in the newspaper, but asking less out of curiosity than from a desire to know how it might be turned to her own advantage, particularly as regards the possibility of obtaining invitations to Senatorial receptions, would demand:

"Who's to be President of the Senate?"

"What do you want me to say?" her husband would grumble, and—as always at meal-times when any subject cropped up that might conceivably lead to an argument—would suddenly manifest enormous interest in what was on his plate, and remark, perhaps:

"This steak could have done with a little more butter, don't you think?"

Or he would turn a piece of omelette round and round on the end of his fork until, satisfied as to its deplorable dryness, he would peevishly drench it with vinegar and remark, as if this were the reason for his sudden ill-humour:

"Possibly it won't be quite so bad like this!"

Michel, however, was not to be put off by such interruptions, and offered his own opinion:

"It'll be the Vice-President, of course."

At that Monsieur Varambaud, thoroughly exasperated and rushing headlong into precisely what he wished to avoid, pronounced with finality: "Constant will be President!"—naming a former minister whose unfortunate lot it had been to suppress a series of riots.

"The man who murdered the miners!" Michel exclaimed.

"You and your fine phrases!" his father retorted.

"Well, they *were* murdered."

"And a very good job too!"

Sometimes, moved to wrath by something he had seen in the newspaper, Michel could not resist discussing it at table with forcible observations of his own. It would, of course, inevitably be some new crime on the part of the General Staff, or further irrefutable proof of Dreyfus' innocence.

Such vehemence was an outrage to Monsieur Varambaud's sense of his own importance, so carefully fostered by everyone else, and he could only shrug his shoulders in annoyance and remark:

"You got that from *l'Aurore*! I suppose"—with a sneering emphasis on the name.

Immediately after *déjeuner* Monsieur Varambaud would prepare to set out for his office. Madame Varambaud and Cécile would dash out into the hall where he was putting on his overcoat, and Madame Varambaud would fling open the door of the corridor which led to her son's room and call out to Michel at the top of her voice. Then she would return to her husband, who, having already kissed Cécile goodbye, would be waiting impatiently. At length Michel would appear.

Carefully holding his pince-nez in position—but more often than not he would clumsily knock them off, blindly catching them in mid-air with an exclamation of exasperation—Monsieur Varambaud would stoop for Michel to kiss his cheek. Then it was Madame Varambaud's turn. But first she would pass an eagle eye over his whole turn-out from top to toe, scratching a speck of mud off here, buttoning a button there, or carefully tucking into his overcoat the two ends of silk scarf hanging negligently loose. The frontal inspection finished she would move to the rear. Sometimes, even, seizing the large brush which lay on the hall table, she would give the velvet collar or the hem of the coat a good brushing, while Monsieur Varambaud, afraid of being late, fidgeted restlessly: but Madame Varambaud was not to be put off or cheated of a single necessary stroke of the brush.

This operation brought to a successful conclusion,

she would at last clasp her arms round her husband's neck as if she were never going to see him again. Then she would follow him out on to the landing and watch him disappear round the curve of the stairs; as soon as he was gone she would dash into the study, fling open the window whatever the weather, and watch with eyes oblivious of all else the figure that emerged into the street below and made its dwindling way amongst the other passers-by, erect as ever, chest well out, umbrella in one hand, bundle of papers under the other arm. At a certain spot he always turned round and waved, and Madame Varambaud waved back. Then at last, her whole expression altering, she would shut the window, and there followed the usual hour of feverish activity that always preceded her departure. Doors slammed, keys clicked, voices called. Attracted by the noise, Michel, for want of anything better to do, would stroll over to his mother's room.

The door would be open, and so would be the door of Cécile's room on the opposite side of the corridor. From the gloomy little bathroom separating the two rooms Madame Varambaud's voice would suddenly emerge:

"Ready, Cécile?"

Cécile, who had just sat down at her table, would reply in the affirmative. And at once, clad in a black petticoat, her yellowish flannel wrapper flung back from her shoulders to reveal a linen chemise, and all one side of her face covered with soapy lather, Madame

Varambaud would appear with a towel in her hand and make for the mantelpiece of her room, on one corner of which rested an open book; peering at it she would begin:—

“Dictation. . . Heading: A proof of the existence of God.”

She then would return to the bathroom and energetically resume her interrupted soaping, and a moment later her voice would be heard again, a little muffled, but carefully enunciating every syllable:

“Let us suppose that a traveller . . .”

And as long as her ablutions lasted Madame Varambaud would continue this coming and going from book to wash-basin and from wash-basin to book. At length, the skin of her face shining, and exhaling a fresh smell of cheap soap, she began to dress. Skirt and bodice were quickly slipped on, and then she would seat herself on the edge of her chaise-longue and change her large fur-trimmed slippers for the low-heeled button-boots into which her narrow, flat feet slipped easily.

“Finished!” proclaimed the distant voice of Cécile.

Then, dictating from memory and never interrupting her operations with the button-hook, Madame Varambaud would continue:

“. . . The weather was calm. The Milky Way was like a filmy cloud . . .”

As soon as she had finished dressing she would call out to her daughter, and Cécile would at once shut her

exercise-book, wipe her pen, put on her hat, and go out into the hall to await her mother, who would be still giving the maid instructions as she emerged from the kitchen.

And every day the racket came to an abrupt end with the final slam of the front door; to be succeeded immediately by the deepest silence.

Half-idle, half-curious, Michel would often wander back into his sister's room, still marvelling at the extraordinary spectacle he witnessed every day, the inner meaning of which he could not fathom, but the details of which never failed to astonish him. The various objects and furniture were ranged before him in their unchanging order. There was nothing to reveal any taste or preference, any dominant quality or even any failing. The carpetless parquet-floor was shining, and the polished furniture. The mirror-fronted wardrobe and the chest of drawers were locked—a precaution against indiscretions on his part. But Michel knew where the bunch of keys was hidden. For some months he had regularly found it beneath the eiderdown: then it had been transferred to a position under the hair-brush in a drawer of the dressing-table.

Hoping in this way to surprise some indication of the secret underlying this mysterious and to him appallingly empty life, he opened the wardrobe so jealously locked against him and let his eyes roam from the top shelf to the bottom. Sometimes he had the luck to find a box of chocolates or dragées; and although

he felt sure they had been counted, he never failed to deduct in advance the large percentage that he considered his due. Then he examined the writing-table. But the finds he made there reduced him to mere yawning boredom and exasperation, as much at the conscientious stupidity revealed as at a submissiveness quite inexplicable.

One day, looking at the school-books neatly arranged in the drawer, he opened one of them entitled: "Chronology of the History of France."

After a succinct enumeration of the principal events of the Christian era ("Year 2, Massacre of the Holy Innocents; A.D. 12, Jesus among the Elders: A.D. 3, Preaching of John the Baptist: A.D. 30, Baptism and Fasting of Jesus Christ: A.D. 33, Descent of the Holy Ghost among the Apostles"—and so on) the history of France proper began with Pharamond, whom the author scrupulously described as "doubtful":

"Pharamond, doubtful, 420-428."

Then came the list of his successors:

"Clodion the Hairy, 428-448; Merovic, 448-458." And then Childeric I, and Clovis I, and Clotaire I, and Caribert, and Chilperic I, and Clotaire II, one after another, with not a single name omitted, right down to the present day. With modern times the information was more detailed. How many events would never have penetrated to Michel's consciousness had chance not made him choose precisely this one book from among so many others! Would he have

ever known that on November 24, 1877, the Chamber of Deputies had refused to enter into relations with the extra-Parliamentary ministry led by General de Rochebouet by 315 votes to 207? that in December, 1844, King Makoko, sovereign of the Bateches, had solemnly bestowed the Grand Collar of his Order upon the French explorer, Savorgnan de Brazza—a favour normally limited to the investitures of first-class Chiefs in the Congo? . . . But, above all, would he for ever have been ignorant of the names of the ministers of France between February 25th, 1875, the date of the proclamation of the Third Republic, and April 7th, 1885, date of the formation of the Brisson-Freycinet ministry, at which point the author had laid down his pen?

Even the names of the various ministers figured in these historical tables.

The last ministry had been composed as follows:

“Brisson, Freycinet, Allain-Targé, Sadi-Carnot, Goblet, Legrand, Hervé-Mangon, Demôle, Sarrien, Campenon, and Galber.”

Towards the end of January Edmée Nollet arrived in Paris. As had been arranged, Michel, furnished with precise instructions by Catherine, went off one afternoon to take his manuscript to the address provided. He had done it up in a tight roll, tied round with string. And as he walked along, swinging from the tip of one finger this small parcel heavy with the

weight of many future decisions, he shivered to think how easily he might irrevocably lose it, and told himself that his whole life was there, suspended by this small material bond which the slightest jerk would suffice to break—not realizing yet that for the Spirit which utilizes it nothing is small or fragile, and that the thinnest gossamer thread blown out by the warm breeze, stretched, shaken, detached and carried away, is yet capable of supporting destiny itself.

The days during which Catherine awaited her friend's return were days of anxious impatience for her. She even dreamed at night of the novel she would soon be reading. If only it proved to be good! The importance of that was tremendous. Sometimes she was certain of its success, sometimes she feared Michel might have failed. . . . At last Edmée returned. Catherine had thought to see her at once. But a whole day passed and then another before she sent word that she was coming.

In the letter which Michel received next day Catherine wrote:

"I'm expecting Edmée Nollet to-day at two o'clock."

But plainly the letter had not been posted at once, for, on the back of the envelope, she had added:

"Manuscript arrived safe and sound."

It was not until the evening, and safe in her own room, that Catherine, with a beating heart, opened the manuscript, whose tightly rolled sheets seemed

to want to keep their secret still. Sitting in a low arm-chair by the fireside she began to read the pages covered with that large, impetuous handwriting she knew so well by now.

Unconsciously determined not to formulate an opinion until she should find a passage she could praise unreservedly, she turned the pages, disappointed in spite of herself by the fierce yet inadequate criticism levelled at the artificial surroundings which had been hers. But this portrayal, in which she neither desired nor was able to recognize herself, gave way to another in which their common memories assailed her with familiar faces. She saw him again, yes, it was certainly Michel, waiting for her in the morning by the rustic gateway of the flowery garden of their villa at Saint-Guénolé. She pushed open the french windows, went out on to the steps, paused for a moment, and then, for all the world as though the pages she was reading had transported her back there in actual fact, there came to her the very smell of the salty air, and the musky, honeyed fragrance of the two beds of pinks and petunias at the foot of the steps.

Together they went down the steep and stony lane that led to the beach; together they scrambled up the narrow gully to the top of the cliffs. Above the long rollers pounding in from the open sea the sky was still, transparent, stainless. There was not a cloud in sight. Sometimes, far away, they could make out a sail, or, in the vast emptiness above them, a sea-gull

tilting with the wind sailed boldly overhead on outstretched wings.

And every evening, either there or on the beach, they watched the closing of a day which had not parted them for a moment. The scenes he evoked called up others to Catherine, and she suddenly remembered with extraordinary vividness a certain July dusk when the sun had seemed to linger on the horizon's rim longer even than usual. They were sitting on a low rock still damp from the last wave of the receding tide. It was nearly nine o'clock, but the day could not yet decide to die. Behind them, from the chapel on its smooth grassy mound overlooking the beach, came the sound of a harmonium and of women's voices singing a hymn. Now and then the deeper, masculine voice of the priest would join in, and the mingled voices rose together in a gentle, melancholy invocation in which a thousand aspirations, a thousand prayers and diverse meanings seemed to echo: involuntarily, even as she talked of other things, she felt her own heart joining in in worship. . . . The bell rang for evening angelus. And suddenly the sun went down and the whole sky flushed with rose, illumining with unbelievable splendour the sea and the granite rocks and the glistening sands where the small pools left by the tide shone multitudinously in the auroral light, like the scattered fragments of a broken mirror. She had found some tiny round pebbles in a cranny of the rock and, no longer talking now, let them trickle through her

fingers, wondering at their improbable colour, unable to decide whether they were white or really pink.

After that the bad days had begun: first the suspicions, then the hostility of Madame Rouves, and soon of everyone else: and at last their separation. And the tears that Jeanne Rouves had shed on parting, the tears that had been Catherine's, she wiped again from her own eyes now.

She had finished the first part of the book. The second part returned again to Saint-Loup. But the interest seemed to her to flag with this description of a life that, from intimate acquaintance with it, she was in a better position to judge than Michel. In endowing Catherine with his own melancholy, indeed, Michel had been portraying himself, not her at all. And not only did Catherine fail to recognize herself any more, but the book itself now seemed to her both generalized and distorted. If she had had such feelings at all they had been quite exceptional. To describe her whole life as being as sad and depressed as one day may have seemed to her mere exaggeration.

On the other hand, what was odious in the character of her mother she attributed to Michel's persistent resentment: and, taking her stand on that, from the moment the events portrayed ceased to be real and became merely imaginary she refused to believe in them, and denied they could have had such fatal consequences or presaged such danger. When Madame Rouves, at the ball, introduced her daughter to her destined husband,

Catherine smiled almost with disdain at the unlikelihood of such a betrothal. *She* would never have allowed herself to be presented like that! Where on earth, and in whatever sort of society, could things happen in such a way? And she resolved to point out these errors to Michel; it never occurred to her that even if in his ignorance he had omitted to describe the proper social stratagems (and her surprise at their absence showed that like everyone else she took them for granted), what he was showing her was nothing less than the naked truth, stripped of all veils.

But when he came to write of the days before the wedding, reminding her of past emotions and even confronting her with whole passages from her own letters, she felt herself suddenly back on the scene again, dismayed and terrified now because the sense of false security with which she had just been reading was so exactly like the blindness with which Jeanne Rouves had submitted to her fate and come to her present pass in the story. Prey to a panting curiosity and almost unbearably uneasy, but incapable of stopping now, she feverishly followed her double down that painful path which was both nightmare and reality. It was not Jeanne Rouves, it was herself, who on that evening burned all her memories in the dying fire in her room; it was she who in the morning was hooked into her white dress by her mother, she for whom the carriage waited below. She bent her head to enter it, gathering up in both hands the silken folds of her long train; and

suddenly, as if poised between the moment that had not yet come to be and the present from which she had already half-escaped, she heard a voice within her warning her to make no mistake, warning her that in this magic mirror in which she had been permitted so opportunely to recognize herself she was seeing the picture of one only of the two decisions she could make and between which she was free to choose.

Now that she had begun to read it was no longer possible for her to take her eyes away, and the grievous story must be followed to the end. But at the sight of the vile reality underlying thoughts she had once entertained, thoughts she had rather put on one side than actually banished, she was filled with shame. She asked herself how such a thing could have been possible. She had indeed shown her want of courage just when it had been most needed, had indeed failed to choose and follow her own destiny! Then shame gave way to an almost insupportable shrinking and horror; and when Michel finally broke away from his rôle of impotent spectator and intervened to alter the ineluctable conclusion she was at the end of her strength and her emotions.

And emerging from the dream, still shuddering even as she gave thanks that it had been only a dream—thanks to whom, she did not know—how fervent was her vow to profit by the lesson of that frightful experience, the actual ordeal of which she had been spared! Her cautious heart at last acknowledged the force of Jeanne Rouves' tardy resolution, and pas-

sionately she also swore to be resolved, astonished only that she had not been so before. No longer would she be weak; no longer should others rule that life for which she and she alone must be responsible. No matter what the obstacles, she would follow him boldly, unswervingly, and achieve at last the long dreamt-of happiness that had been haunting her all her life, and that now, through Michel's instrumentality, she was approaching for the first time and yet, it seemed, with a flavour of rediscovery.

The book was finished; Catherine let the last page fall. And just as another Catherine (whom she believed she was for ever rid of now) had sat there gazing at the useless memories rising from the past like symbols of remorse, so now she sat pensive and unmoving, her eyes heavy with tears, and for a long time stared into the dying fire.

Next day, still shaken by the last night's experience, she wrote off at once to Michel, laying bare her emotions and hopes and her marvelling pride in him. But after describing her first impressions, and really moved by a desire to leave nothing undone that might help him to success, fearing as she did that her praise might be set down to a lover's tender bias, she set to work to criticise.

It was an interesting book, she declared, with a well-sustained theme. Nevertheless, as a novel it lacked life. The characters thought rather than acted. The reader

followed their thoughts and their feelings (above all their feelings), yet life was wanting. Finally, it was badly written—or, rather, it was not written at all. And she begged him to get into touch with some other writer whose work he admired and who might give him advice as to form. Meanwhile, to eliminate the longuets and repetitions would at least be something.

He would have to prune, to cut fearlessly, that the story might emerge more clearly from the confusion that now nullified the action.

“If you like, I’ll do it for you myself!”

From matters of treatment she passed to the idea of the book—an idea which she found great and new and beautiful and true, much finer, in short, than she had ever expected.

“The last thirty pages rise up and rise up to the unmistakable symbolism of the climax. I believe in the *usefulness* of this book. In the next day or two I shall try it out on Edmée Nollet. I’ve already read the last two chapters to Alice; she was thoroughly shaken and swears she will never, never, allow herself to be married off like that.”

She added:

“The first victory!”—unconsciously revealing the reckless sense of security that allowed her to see others rather than herself as benefiting from the lesson read; revealing too, perhaps, less fortitude than a desire to deceive herself and a lasting terror of the destiny that haunted her.

AT THE END of her stay with the de Laignes, Alice le Hombre, whose parents lived at Marseilles, was to take Catherine back with her. As soon as the visit was decided upon Catherine began trying to think of a way in which it might be utilized for seeing Michel; but she had scarcely made the suggestion before all its difficulties became apparent. What excuse could he make to his parents to cover an absence of several days? Where would they be able to meet? If anyone saw them their parents were sure to be informed at once. Then there was the money question. How could he raise the necessary sum for the journey? Quite simply Michel asked Catherine to send him all the money she could get hold of. If he could only get enough for his ticket and his room and a couple of francs a day for food he would be all right. But when she said she had none he suggested she should put aside all the odd change that her mother might leave lying about in her drawers or purse; she could even offer to go shopping for her mother and thus find means of saving a little here and there; and she would surely be given her pocket-money for the trip, so that all she need do was pretend to have lost her purse. In that way she

ought easily to be able to send him thirty francs or so.

Catherine did not refuse outright, but neither would she commit herself.

"I won't say no," she wrote. "But it all seems to me terribly complicated."

And as the day of the journey drew nearer new difficulties arose while the old ones became even more insurmountable.

Thus it was impossible, as she had hoped at first, to travel with him all the way from Saint-Loup to Marseilles; for after it had already been decided that the two girls should make their journey alone, it had now been settled that someone was to accompany them. Even at Marseilles they might not be allowed to go out by themselves—or only for the shortest walks or excursions. To these and every objection Michel opposed an impassioned obstinacy, less in the hope of overcoming the difficulties raised—for he had realized by now that he would never succeed in raising the money for the journey—than in an attempt to discover what was going on at the bottom of Catherine's mind, and whether or not the fear of landing herself in an awkward situation was not outweighing her desire to see him again.

At last, with nothing as yet arranged, the two girls departed; and one day the post-mark on her letter showed him that she was writing from Marseilles. Only then, face to face with the enormous distance separating

them, did he realize the foolishness of his hopes and the impossibility of their plans ever being realized.

She arrived on a grey and rainy day, and her disappointment on emerging from the station was great. The pavements were muddy. All round were tall houses, busy streets, distant factory chimneys. It reminded her of certain parts of Paris, but a Paris without its soul, noisier and at the same time less lively. Her friend's parents had come to meet the train, and while Alice was excitedly demanding news of various friends and of all that had happened during her absence, Catherine, full of that sense of discouragement which overcomes the stranger in unfamiliar surroundings, felt lonely, homesick, depressed: and suddenly, thinking of Michel, she felt horribly far from him.

But next day when she awoke the rain had stopped and not a cloud was to be seen: it was suddenly spring.

And now an extraordinary restlessness took possession of her. It was not the almost anguished melancholy with which her heart had ached at Saint-Loup to see the first primroses appear. It was, on the contrary, a sort of light-heartedness, a desire to live, an excitement of all the senses, which now seemed to be truly awakening and functioning for the first time in her life. Each day renewed it, and renewed her surprise, and each day added new impressions to those of the previous day. She never tired of gazing at that wonderfully blue sea, at the gardens full of flowers, at a palm-tree suddenly glimpsed before a villa terrace, or the encircling

mountains with their great violet shadows and their forests of holm-oak like a coating of dark moss and their bare, rocky summits paling beneath the ardour of the sun.

Sometimes they would take a drive out into the country. Gradually the sunlight and the tang of the air would mount to her head—light and fragrance so closely intermingled that they seemed to be indivisible, and one might have said that the perfume emanated from the light itself. Alice, opposite her in the carriage, never ceased chattering. But Catherine hardly answered, absently listening to the flow of words that made a kind of rhythmic accompaniment to her own delicious dreams. Everything delighted her: a field planted with olive-trees, goats browsing by the roadside, an ancient church-tower, a village square with the plane trees round its fountain and its café with lowered blinds. The very names of the country places they passed through seemed to hide a kind of gaiety and good humour.

Back in town again they would dismiss the carriage and Madame le Hombre would take them to a *pâtisserie* to eat ices or whipped cream in little heart-shaped containers. Finally, at about six o'clock, tired and rather languid now, they would all walk home together up the rue de Noailles towards the Eglise des Réformés opposite which Monsieur and Madame le Hombre lived.

The electric light standards would just have been lit, and their brilliant bluish glare combated the fading

evening light. All round came the shouts of newspaper boys with the evening papers. The café tables on the pavement were already crowded, and flower-girls, basket on hip, insistently cried their wares as they jostled the passers-by, wrangling amongst themselves for purchasers.

As Madame le Hombre and the two girls approached, the nearest of these would dart towards her prey, importuning them to buy at a price tirelessly repeated in a sort of sing-song (only to be suddenly reduced at the approach of a competitor), walking stubbornly at their side and incessantly thrusting under their very noses a swinging branch of downy mimosa or a handful of little long-stalked nosegays whose delicious scent awoke in Catherine the desire to know what even happier climes and milder springs produced such flowers. She was always the first to stop and buy—from one a bunch of violets, from another the spray of mimosa, or a bunch of pinks or roses to offer to Madame le Hombre. Sometimes Alice would point out to her, buried among the posies in the basket, a little tuft of ball-like flowers she had taught Catherine to know, not pretty in themselves, but with a most penetrating scent—acacia flowers; and these would at once be added to the flowers she had already chosen.

As they approached the house Catherine would be aware of a slight chill of apprehension: the Paris post always arrived at this time of the evening. And she was as afraid of receiving no letter at all from Michel as of

finding one whose contents might spoil the end of her day. Already Alice—for it was she who juggled with the letters beneath the unsuspecting eyes of Madame le Hombre—already Alice would be fumbling in her bag for the key of the letter-box, which was let into the garden wall at the foot of the steps. She always pretended to have great difficulty in opening the box, thus giving time for her mother and Catherine to get some way up the steps—large steps paved with octagonal tiles and bound with oaken cross-pieces.

Alice by now would have plunged her hand to the bottom of the box and drawn out a bundle of letters which she was examining by the light of the gas-jet; Catherine, half-turning, would call:

“Anything for me?”

If there was a letter from Michel Alice would coolly reply: “No, nothing for you,” and slip the letter into her bag.

Once indoors Catherine would hurry up to her room, and Alice would soon follow with the letter. She would wait a moment to see how its reception affected her friend: would there be trouble, or would all be well? Catherine could tell in advance merely by glancing at the address: if the writing was large, blotchy and full of dashes, and if the address occupied the whole surface of the envelope, she would shake her head sadly. But if the writing was neat and the address small she could open the envelope without anxiety.

Since dinner was so early she had only time to glance

quickly through it, and as soon as she had taken in its general mood and reassured herself as to its contents, she would refold it and slip it into her bodice. And it was not until late at night, back once more in her room, that she could take it out again and enjoy at her ease the anticipated pleasure, which waiting had only intensified.

Meanwhile Michel had got back to work. But gladly as he would have tried to remedy the defects Catherine had indicated in his novel, he simply couldn't find any. She had said it was badly written—yet the sentences were correct, apart from a word here and there which he changed or transposed. The characters lacked life—but how give them life if not by what he had already done? He felt very strongly, though, as he re-read his pages, that something extremely important was wrong. He had almost given up trying to find a solution to the enigma when a chance remark of Flandrin's unexpectedly set him upon the right path.

It was on a Thursday at the Café de la Palette d'Or where Flandrin, Lavarenne, Fageot and Michel had forgathered according to custom. One of them mentioned *Salammbô*, and Michel, who had not heard of it, asked who was the author. They all exclaimed at such ignorance, and Fageot jeered:

"Look at the fellow who's going to be an author and hasn't read Flaubert!"

And indeed, only because he had been vaunted by

one of the more despised of his school-fellows, Michel had nourished so deep a prejudice against Flaubert that he had never from that day to this so much as glanced at a single one of his books, dismissing him as second-rate simply because he personally had never read him. Fageot's opinion gave him no reason to alter his own. But Flandrin in his usual quiet tones seriously advised him to read everything of Flaubert's. It would, he asserted, prove useful to him. And, the subject once launched, the others became so lavish in their praise that next time Michel went to the library he was moved by sheer curiosity into asking for *Madame Bovary*.

Style, for those who know nothing of its real nature, is generally taken to mean no more than the effect of writing upon one's feelings, and most people will tell you that a book is well-written if it has moved them and badly written if it has left them indifferent or upset them by not being what they expect. Michel, therefore, finding nothing to move him in the opening pages, took their quiet precision for inadequacy, and began by feeling disappointed. Was this the famous style of Flaubert! What, then, did its vaunted perfection consist of? In what way was it different from others, or better than his own? But the exactitude of the expression, effortlessly following every curve of the emotion rendered, was such that as the emotion increased so did the style expand and shake off its purposeful restraint: and as he read these magic cadences in which every shade of love and melancholy

echoed and re-echoed, he discovered at last the secret so vainly sought till now.

Taking this book as his pattern, then, and never wearying of re-reading it, he decided to re-write his own novel from start to finish, without bothering about what Catherine was doing in the way of corrections, work that seemed to him now worse than useless. She herself, moreover, had confessed that she wasn't getting on very fast with it; she couldn't work, the weather was too hot. . . . And then she was so afraid of spoiling the idea. . . . The result of all this was that an occasional page or two of the manuscript returned, annotated in her delicate handwriting, and accompanied by lengthy dissertations on the improprieties and defects of the writing, half caustic, half sententious, like a school-marm correcting an exercise. But if she felt a certain satisfaction at not having to abdicate all superiority in face of him whom she now held in such reverence, and perhaps allowed herself to adopt a tone of slightly pedantic authority, it was not vanity that moved her so much as apprehension of being left behind, and the airs she gave herself covered an almost timid longing to draw closer to him.

February drew to its end. It was the time when the Varambauds have their three big annual dinner-parties at intervals of a week. For the first time since they had come to live in Paris Catherine was not asked. The dates were fixed and the invitations sent out without

her name being so much as mentioned; and now the discussion of the menus was in full swing.

Every evening after dinner Madame Varambaud would recount the results of her afternoon's excursions to various caterers, cataloguing names and prices. Then when the meal had been cleared away, she would bring out the plans submitted to her, Monsieur Varambaud would feel in his pockets for last year's menus, and together they would set to work to scrutinize the little menu-cards, each with the name of a guest inscribed on the back. The first thing to do was to delete from the menu any dishes that had been served the winter before.

With the slender silver pencil that hung from her watch-chain Madame Varambaud would cross out a pheasant patty here, a lobster timbale there.

"It would be very nice to have *filets de sole Rossini*," she observed. "They're delicious, but it's useless to think of it. We had them, if you remember, Papa, at the Badouin's dinner. That's too recent. And the guests will be almost the same."

But if Monsieur Varambaud was doing his best to devise a pleasant meal, Madame Varambaud was solely concerned with making it a practical one. And her choice fell mainly on those dishes which seemed likely to provide the most useful remains—remains, too, which would give the Despériers and Madame Armelle, who were always invited next day, some idea of the splendour of the previous evening's meal.

When it came to table decorations, however, Monsieur Varambaud gave his wife a free hand, and she would choose what from other people's dinner-parties appeared to be the most fashionable arrangement of the moment. This year everybody had garlands of smilax with a centre-piece of flowering prunus.

The week before the first of these parties was for Madame Varambaud the busiest time imaginable. In addition to the calls she had to pay, which nothing in the world would have made her miss, she had to visit the pastry-cooks, order the wines, come to terms with the florist, engage the special servants. One whole day was given up to polishing. The great dining-room side-board was carried bodily into the hall and the silver taken out. The best dinner-service was brought down from the high shelf in the store-cupboard which it usually occupied. Then it was the turn of the glasses, some of which must be replaced. And, on top of all this, Madame Varambaud was coaching her daughter for a paper in ancient history, most unluckily fixed for the very day of the dinner-party.

This was an important matter. On the last occasion Cécile had only been third; so it was absolutely necessary for her to do brilliantly this time! As Madame Varambaud could not possibly be away from home for long on such a day as this, it was arranged that Madame Armelle, who would be coming in the morning with an offering of fruit from her own garden, should accompany them to Cécile's class in the afternoon, and that

Madame Varambaud, having at least heard the subject set for composition, should leave them there.

At ten o'clock on the morning of the day of the dinner there was a ring at the bell followed by three gentle taps on the door: Madame Armelle's way of announcing herself.

She was carrying a heavy basket and an enormous armful of foliage solidly tied round with thick string.

"I thought," she burst out almost at once, still breathless from her ascent of the stairs and embracing her daughter and thrusting the leaves upon her almost simultaneously, "I thought if you were going to have some flowers on the table these would look very nice with them."

Madame Varambaud sized the gift up with one quick glance and then thanked her mother warmly. They were indeed very pretty. Unfortunately she already had all she needed. They should go in the hall, however.

But the fruit was a signal for raptures. Such lovely apples! And the pears! And all the while they were taking them out of the basket and laying them out on the hall table Madame Armelle related the history of each individual fruit.

"There, that's a Beurre-Sterckmann. It doesn't look up to much but I've put it in with the others because really it's the perfection of perfection. It's that little tree, you know, next to the big plum."

Madame Varambaud answered in monosyllables,

privately jettisoning all perfections that do not look up to much and counting the specimens which, by virtue of their looks, could aspire to the honour of her table. She needed eight for each fruit-dish. . . . Oh yes, there would be plenty.

When the basket was at last emptied, Madame Armelle lifted her cloth skirt with a mysterious but business-like air and produced from the deep pocket of her petticoat a small bottle, carefully corked. It was part of her store of blackcurrant wine, and she had brought it to add to the liqueurs to be served after dinner. At this moment, it being time for *déjeuner*, Monsieur Varambaud emerged from his room. At the sound of his door opening Madame Armelle hurriedly straightened her skirt and, still clasping her bottle, rushed up to greet her son-in-law with her usual effusiveness.

They went into *déjeuner* immediately, and even before she had sat down Madame Armelle launched into an account of how she had not moved a muscle when the man at the *octroi* had boarded the tram to ask if anyone had anything to declare.

"That's why I always take the tram when I've got anything I don't want to declare, because in the tram. . . ."

She stopped short, wide-eyed, as her daughter kicked her vigorously under the table. This was a subject best not elaborated in front of Monsieur Varambaud.

Déjeuner, which was very short today, was nearly finished, and Madame Varambaud had just dismissed her Breton servant with a "Hurry, Perrine, you've still got the silver to finish," when there was a crash of breaking glass from the kitchen.

Madame Varambaud leapt from her chair and disappeared: there were loud exclamations and reproaches, followed by subdued explanations. At length she returned, distraught.

"Perrine has broken the salt-cellar!"

"What salt-cellar?" demanded Monsieur Varambaud.

"The blue-glass lining of one of the big silver ones!"

"One of the lovely blue salt-cellars that Monsieur Camille gave you!" moaned Madame Armelle.

But after the first moment of shock, Madame Varambaud, contemplating the havoc this would cause in the proper setting of her table, wasted no time in futile lamentation. Like a general caught in the thick of the battle by unpredictable misfortune she quickly made her new dispositions. Very well, she would have to miss Cécile's class! She would go instead to the watch-maker's at the Pont-Neuf where she knew the salt-cellars had been bought.

She dressed hurriedly, gave instructions to the waiters who had just arrived and to Cécile who was just about to set off with her satchel for her class, left the house and jumped into a 'bus, got out in the Boulevard Sebastopol and entered the Église Saint-Leu; she had made a vow to the Holy Ghost to go to church every

day for a fortnight so that Cécile might be first in her composition, but today she proposed to compromise by walking through the church and out at the other side into the rue de Rivoli.

With hurried steps she marched down the aisle, silent and empty at that time of day, rapidly explaining to the Holy Ghost that today, owing to her dinner-party, she had no time to stay. She had had, besides, an accident to her salt-cellar; and here she added a supplementary invocation, promising to make a longer call next day to make up for the brevity of this one, which admittedly, as she would have been the first to agree, was a little on the short side.

When, an hour later, she got home again, having fortunately succeeded in fitting a new blue glass lining to her silver salt-cellar, she found everyone hard at work. The doors were all wide open. Moving about the kitchen she saw the chef in his white coat and cap; on the hall table one of the waiters was folding napkins. The air was heavy with the smell of truffles and puff-pastry.

Without even stopping to take off her hat, and with a medicinal cigarette between her lips to guard against the attack of asthma which she feared in the midst of such excitements, she burst into the dining-room like a whirlwind.

The table was already almost laid. The four fruit-dishes were arranged symmetrically at each corner, and the flowering centre-piece had just been brought in.

To the waiter who was depositing it in its appointed place she handed the little parcel containing the eighth salt-cellar, and then departed to the kitchen: the chef was occupied at one end of the range stirring a sauce in a little tall copper saucepan.

Having tried, but unsuccessfully, to discover how the mellowness of *sauce mousseline* was to be obtained, she urged her maid not to wait until the last minute before putting on her Breton festival dress and returned to her own room. There, ridding herself at last of hat and coat, she began to lay out her husband's clothes.

At every other moment the bell of the service staircase rang. Now it was a girl bringing a basket of rolls. Now it was the *petit fours*, now the ice. At five o'clock Monsieur Varambaud came home: and the waiters, having finished their work, were beginning their own dinner when the front-door bell rang twice, announcing Cécile.

To the great astonishment of the waiter who was moving to open the door Madame Varambaud rushed past him and threw it open herself.

"Well?" she cried.

They had had Alexander of Macedon.

Madame Varambaud sighed a deep sigh of relief. Cécile had done him only the evening before. She immediately addressed a private prayer of collective thanks to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity: then followed by Cécile and Madame Armelle, she made for her daughter's room.

Opening the satchel which she had placed on her yellow wooden table, Cécile immediately took out the rough draft of her composition. Madame Varambaud seized it and started feverishly reading, blinking at the erasures and turning frequently to the notes, which were indicated by crosses. From time to time, without interrupting her reading, she would register approval with a slight movement of her eyebrows; but when she came to mistakes in spelling she was unable to restrain exclamations of vexation, which made Cécile's cheeks quiver.

Alexander the Great. (1) Alexander's character; (2) Submission of Greece; (3) Darius (called Codoman); (4) The crossing of the Granicus; (5) Battle of Issus, capture of Tyre and battle of Arbela; (6) Darius' death; (7) Alexander's excesses, murder of Clitus; (8) Limit of Alexander's conquests; (9) Alexander's death.

"Good," said Madame Varambaud. "So at least this time you made a Scheme!"

She went on reading, quickly skimming the narrative to get at the names and places.

336, Alexander's first expedition. He overthrows Greece, destroys Thebes, which has revolted, cuts Darius' first army to pieces (334). . . .

"I shall have to look at the book," said Madame Varambaud. "I'm not sure of the dates myself."

". . . conquers again at the battle of Issus and delivers the crown of Zion to the aged Abdolonymus (a venerable

old man who lived in the country, cultivating his garden). Then, and this is perhaps the most marvellous of all his exploits, he lays siege to Tyre . . . 30,000 reduced to slavery . . . siege of Gaza . . . archpriest Jaddus warned in a dream by God Himself of Alexander's approach . . . 90,000 Persian soldiers killed . . . the satrap Bessus put to death . . . expedition against the Scythians . . . Petra Oxiana . . . 327, Bucephalus killed at the crossing of the Hydaspe . . .'

Madame Varambaud raised her head.

"It all seems all right!" she said.

At this moment a waiter came in to say that they were three sherbert glasses short. Madame Varambaud merely pointed to Michel's room, where she had arranged a reserve of glasses on the chest-of-drawers, and, her eyes immediately returning to the point she had reached in the essay, she continued to read, murmuring at intervals:

"Good, very good!"

As she finished each page she placed it on the table before her without taking her eyes from the new page which she would have already started. Suddenly she uttered an exclamation of delight, remembering her advice to Cécile not to forget, if the subject set should be the reign of Alexander, the list of the generals who had divided his empire.

"There! You got them in after all! Wasn't I right to make you learn them?"

And, holding the page stiff between her fingers, she began reciting in a low voice:

“Eumenius, Ptolemy son of Lagus, Cassander who strangled Alexander’s mother, Seleucus, Antigone (whose son was Demetrius surnamed Conqueror of Cities), and Lysimachus.”

Madame Armelle, whose desire to get in a word of her own had been making her lips involuntarily twitch for some moments past, now decided that her moment had come. Eyes sparkling with eagerness, she enquired:

“But tell me, Cécile how did you *finish*? That’s extremely important, you know!”

And turning to Madame Varambaud—whose advanced mind at once decided that what might have been good in her mother’s day was very much outmoded now, and who listened now with an irreverence which Madame Armelle, full of the effect she was going to produce, did not even notice—she continued:

“In the old days—you ought to remember, Céline?—we were taught always to end on a resounding word, like Cicero, who would conclude his orations with the word: *Videatur*.”

ONE EVENING, just as they were sitting down to dinner, Madame Varambaud, speaking of the calls she had paid that afternoon, mentioned that she had seen the Raymonds, a family they had met at Saint-Guénolé: she added casually that on New Year's day they had received a charming little note from Catherine, enclosing some of the photographs she had taken during the holidays. For a second it seemed to Michel that his heart had stopped beating; but a moment later the blood started circulating again with a violence that carried a sort of frenzied warmth into every part of his being, and an urge to immediate action. All this time, then, without saying a word to him, secretly, and while he was so bravely working for her, Catherine had chosen to betray their memories and turn to those whose malice and deliberate importunity five months before had ruined their happiness and helped to bring about their separation! Had she forgotten all that? Or had it really caused her much suffering? If she had really suffered at all you would have thought she would have been restrained now by an invincible repugnance. But no; on the contrary, she openly showed her liking for a past in which he had had no place. And her

evident desire to keep up an acquaintanceship which would have perished soon enough of its own accord was tantamount to a desertion of their cause, a desertion, moreover, aggravated by deception.

As soon as dinner was over he sat down and began writing feverishly to Catherine, pouring out all the indignation that had nearly betrayed him into an exclamation when he first heard of her unexpected treachery—an angry and threatening letter, the very violence of which Catherine promptly turned to her own account. She replied, indeed, with the sort of deliberate calm with which one faces a lunatic, quelling him by sheer self-possession: first of all she reversed their positions, making herself out as wronged and, as usual, becoming the accuser rather than the accused.

She could not accept the terms of his letter. If he loved her he would not write in such a way. No decent man would use such expressions to his wife. That lesson over, she turned to the real subject of the argument; far from trying to escape her responsibility, she claimed a perfect right to act as she had acted.

“Yes, I did send the Raymonds the photographs I took of them, and I did add a few words on a card. I did so because it seemed the natural, polite thing to do. Of course, when we are married we shan’t have anything to do with them, as I don’t particularly care for them. In short, it is understood that we shall have nothing to do with anyone.”

At this point, as though it had only needed the

thought of the future to dissipate her anger, her tone abruptly changed, and with a sort of tender gaiety she sought to vindicate herself and prove to him how wrong he had been.

"It is very foolish, my dear husband, to tell me that by sending three words on a card to people like the Raymonds I am thereby giving them a part of my heart. I haven't given them the tiniest part either of my heart or of my mind. I give nothing, nothing at all, in the sort of acquaintance I keep up with such people—not even intellectual intimacy."

And, bewildered and disconcerted by what she regarded as Michel's inexplicable jealousy, she reiterated:

"It is nothing, nothing"—forgetting how slender are the strands that make up any fabric, forgetting that the fly does not see in the spider's silken thread the web in which it is to be caught.

Far from appeasing him, Catherine's reply only irritated Michel the more. That this should be the outcome of all his efforts, all his hopes! To think how certain he had been that his book, the book he had written for her, would convince her and alter her whole nature! Alas! It was plain enough now that she would always be the same, that she would never, never be able to decide between the world and him. She loved him, but of all the attributes of love she refused him the one that included all others: she denied him her confidence, repulsed him at the very moment when he

was warning her of danger. If they were so slight, these bonds which she could not or would not break, why not break them when he begged her to? Even if she did not agree, surely her love should have led her to comply? But no, her stubbornness proved that she would rather displease him than make the necessary effort to free herself. And all his old suspicions rose up again and turned against her, consolidated by the doubts she had reawoken in him. He began to wonder if she had ever really wanted to see him again, and if she really loved him, if she really meant to marry him. . . . And his reawakening distrust continually finding new subjects for suspicion, he started to harass her now with insidious questions and reproaches, endlessly repeated and endlessly varied. So upset was he indeed by the idea that she could lie to him, and so fresh still was the wound, so painful the apprehension, that he sought less to prove her sincere than to catch her out and unmask her unworthiness.

The shock of this attack, coming like a bolt from the blue to destroy her happiness, dumbfounded Catherine at first, but she sank soon from bewilderment to despair. Vainly she tried to discover the reason for this sudden change in him. What had happened, what could have happened, to justify these attacks? And since in all sincerity she did not consider herself at fault she concluded bitterly that he was trying to put her in the wrong so that he could break with her on the

pretence of being injured. Didn't he love her any more? Why couldn't he say so frankly, then, instead of making all these excuses? Sometimes, in her depression, she would have welcomed a break, but at other times she shrank from the idea. And then, to frighten him, she would threaten to do what she dreaded he might do—"avenge" herself, as she called it, by marrying someone else if he abandoned her now: a threat which Michel received with a contempt very close to hatred, since he took it as justification of his own fears and fresh cause, therefore, for anger and suspicion. The perpetual duel left them utterly worn out, and weariness at length brought about a respite which they took for reconciliation.

The very duration of their quarrels led them to forget more often than not the original cause, and the truce which followed left it untouched; so that new shoots were incessantly sprouting from the still vigorous stock. Continually resumed and never finally concluded, their arguments became so entangled that soon they were inextricably confused. Michel would produce contradictory statements made months apart and harshly demand how they were to be reconciled; he attacked everything, pell-mell; now her views on religion, now on acting; then he would hark back to Claude de Brionne, or her dread of displeasing her mother, or her only half-hearted desire to see him again. To make matters worse, several days must elapse between question and answer, and Catherine might either fail

to reply at all or else beg the question, evading the truth for fear of the consequences and then deliberately persisting in the lie she had told. And thus fresh conflicts would arise before the old ones had been settled. And in his exasperation at his inability to pin her down, Michel would end up by deliberately trying to hurt her, so that among all her shams and fantasies one cry at least should show him he had touched the real Catherine.

But as she suffered, so she became more sincere; and her suffering was expressed in tones so ardent and lively that Michel, engrossed in writing his book and forgetting whose heart it was that was suffering so, soon had the idea of using certain passages, touching them up where they seemed to him a little inadequate. Such was a certain mood of depression when, in semi-delirium, she had counted the roses on her bed-room wallpaper; this was to be used for Jeanne Rouves some time before her wedding. And the nightmare she had described in all its details while still beneath its oppression would be dreamt by Jeanne Rouves on her wedding-eve.

He felt, however, that he must tell Catherine what he was doing. But the embarrassment he foresaw when trying to imagine her reply gave way to embarrassment of quite another kind when he actually received it. For it was as though she had suddenly found a means of escape from the infernal circle in which she had been revolving. She thanked him ardently for what she

called this exquisitely delicate attention, and in his fancied hesitation to make use of such intimate details she saw only a desire to avoid doing hurt to her feelings. Could he doubt but that everything of hers was his? That she herself was entirely his?

"This heart which you have educated, whose feelings and sensations you have refined, is all yours; I give it you: do what you like with it. Have no more scruples then in drawing from it. I should only be too happy to think I had a part in your success. You write with your own heart and with mine: that joins us more indissolubly than all the conventions of society."

And now at last, in her new-found security, she dared look back upon the past and recall her moments of doubt; but these only moved her now to fresh expressions of the love with which she was filled.

"You see," she explained, "I'm sometimes afraid of not being loved. As for myself, I love every bit of you. I love you with all the tenderness of which a woman is capable. My heart overflows with love; and I ask only to lavish it all upon you."

In a moment, it seemed, her happiness had returned, and the only regret her letters revealed now was that he was not there to share it with her. Eagerly she recalled the past, the big arm-chair in her room; again and again she reiterated her longing to see him. Just five minutes with him! And what wouldn't she give to be able to steal upon him one morning and kiss him gently as he slept, so that his awakening should only

be the continuation of a blissful dream! It was almost exactly a year ago that he had come to Saint-Loup. She recalled their meeting on the platform, and his first words: "You still love me? Nothing's altered?" This year it was she who wanted to ask that question. It seemed to her such an extraordinary thing, to be loved; in earlier days she had taken it for granted.

Michel, for his part, had begun to recapture something of the old confidence when a fresh blow descended upon his defenceless head. She had confided to him once that she felt so happy, so enveloped in well-being—well-being born of the certainty of their love—that sometimes she felt positively afraid; afraid that the perfect love each had for the other might be schanged by living together, by physical possession. And she had conceived the idea of an ideal life where love should be complete and for ever unchanged.

"What do you think?" she asked. "Should one wish for such a thing?" And she added: "Aren't you sure of me even now? You seem in such a hurry to make me yours. I am so sure of you that if I had to wait ten years for you, twenty years, all my life, I could wait in patience. . . ." In such avowals, in such pledges, Michel divined once again an undertone of ambiguity, confirming him in the very doubts that should have been dispelled.

While Michel was struggling thus without respite, Lavarenne, apparently so near his goal, had had to

admit himself beaten. With the same calm brevity with which he had announced his engagement, he now announced that it was broken off. But why? But how? On these points he remained mute and impenetrable. He never breathed a word of his disappointment, but the savage contempt with which he joined in with Michel's strictures on the frailty and duplicity of women allowed one to guess at the depth of the wound and the cruelty of the blow inflicted.

Meanwhile the little group which this affair had broken up drew together again now that it was over. Not an evening passed without Flandrin and Lavarenne calling for Michel, and all three going off together to finish the evening at the Bar Antoine.

Perched on their tall stools and shamelessly monopolizing the polished counter, much to the barman's annoyance, they would make their choice from so-called English drinks which necessitated the most complicated preparation and must be drunk through straws. Lavarenne, who boasted a strong stomach, would insist on having a double dose of the condiments that formed important ingredients of these concoctions: and the white-jacketed barman, rolling a tilted glass half filled with crushed ice between his fingers and betraying neither surprise nor disapproval, would seriously enumerate the various methods of making a drink more dangerous. Lavarenne's vanity would be roused. Nothing was too dangerous or too potent for him! He did not add—or too nasty; but he did his

best to make it so. One evening he demanded the addition of red pepper. The barman, waiting for the grimace that should follow the first gulp, smiled. But the other tossed it down imperturbably and declared that it wasn't at all too bad; a bit tasteless, perhaps.

Stirred by emulation, Flandrin even abandoned his role of starveling poet for that of an *habitué* of fashionable bars. His hat on the back of his head, one leg twisted round the leg of his stool, he would sit there imbibing with a sort of Yankee phlegm the contents of a glass of multi-coloured cordials, one ring on top of another, the whole variegated mass diminishing together as he sucked like the waters of a whirlpool.

Later on Désormeaux might arrive. His friends were greeted always with a smile of nicely calculated superiority, but for the ordering of his drink he would assume a most serious expression, and curtly, as though positively driven to it, demand a brandy and water. Or Fageot might come in. He did not take his drinking at all seriously. He would ask for a bock or a coffee and immediately sit down and start talking—of his paper, of a bit of reporting he'd done, of Bailby, the editor—and chuckling at Michel's bitter sallies, the more amused, it seemed, the more exaggerated they were.

By now the theatre interval would have brought a crowd of people in for a quarter of an hour, until the bell rang to call them back again. It sometimes hap-

pened that among them would be some actor who was not playing that evening, or perhaps only in the curtain-raiser. There was, in particular, a certain Rumanian Jew who had decided that the best method of presenting himself with a French name was to choose an aristocratic-sounding Christian name and tack on to it a particle: thus, de Guy. And such nobility, allied to a commanding appearance, had very much impressed Lavarenne, who secretly tried to copy him. But the gulf between this Parisian artisan's son and the supple Levantine was so great that Lavarenne alone knew who his model was, and nobody would have imagined, to see them together, that one was a copy of the other.

His theatrically noble head with its broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat (the shovel hat which Lavarenne affected was a distant replica of this) would appear first, then he would mince forward on his high heels, swinging his hips, his tightly fitting frock-coat markedly waisted. He would be talking away loudly to the supernumerary with him, without so much as looking at him, affectedly articulating every syllable in his lisping tones. A place would be made for him and he would lean one elbow on the bar, hip thrust out, slender cigarette drooping from two fingers of an outstretched hand, or conveyed from time to time to his lips and removed again while he waved aside the thread of smoke.

One evening as de Guy made his entrance through the glazed double-doors from the theatre, Fageot, to

the astonishment of his companions, removed his hat and approached him.

The other, quite impassive, arrested this eagerness with a curt and frigid word or two, deliberately enunciated in his warm voice.

"I don't know you. Who are you?"

Fageot, still holding his hat in his hand, bowed and introduced himself:

"Robert Fageot, of the Press."

Without so much as pausing, de Guy let fall the simple words:

"Ah! Good evening!" the deliberate rudeness of which passed Fageot by, but which was acknowledged by Lavarenne with a slight compression of the lips and a sort of pinched smile of envy and contempt.

Thus, gradually, they came to know the regular actors of the theatre, and often, through one or another of them, sometimes just before the curtain rose, sometimes unexpectedly in the middle of the performance, would receive tickets for the show. Once or twice they even succeeded in penetrating to a dress-rehearsal, where, with an eye to further invitations, they applauded wildly. But the more pathetic moments left Michel quite unmoved; indeed, when the lover cried aloud his love or sobbed his despair, when de Guy, for instance, went through his well-known death-agony, complete with hiccoughs, death-rattle, and final convulsion, Michel, growing ever colder as the emotion of the house intensified, would glance round sardonically

at the spectators and, seeing the eyes of many wet with tears, wonder disgustedly how people could bring themselves to vulgarize the most painful, holy, or solemn moments in man's life; and, when the audience broke out into applause, he would have liked to shout: "Well lied!"

After the play he would accompany Lavarenne up the Boulevard Sebastopol, leave him at the rue Réaumur, and make his way home. At this time of night everyone would be asleep, and he would creep noiselessly up to his father's study, light the lamp (often the glass was still warm) and arrange his own papers on top of the scattered documents on the desk.

He had got to the point of Jeanne Rouves' return to Saint-Loup. She was alone, despairing, and yet not entirely without hope. In his first version this period of waiting had been merely indicated, but he found now that he had only to turn his eyes inwards to discover ready at hand all the elements required for a more detailed description. His lassitude, indeed, was so dissolvent and so profound that it seemed to bring about a disintegration of his own being. And what an admission of weariness lay in the feeling that, whatever reward the future might bring, the bitterness of the present could never be effaced.

With his father's pen (how annoyed his father always was next day to find it ruined) he wrote with careful deliberation sentences in which, for the first time, thought and expression were immutably married. Some-

times his disburdened heart would for a moment experience a sensation of emptiness, and he would stop writing. Everything was quiet. Not a sound troubled the repose of the sleeping house. Outside, from time to time, a horse in the cab-rank beneath the windows would shake its jingling bell. Only the regular ticking of the clock broke the silence within, or a sudden slight subsidence of ashes behind the transparent windows of the stove; and he would fall into a sort of torpor. It needed an effort to emerge from it—not enough to break the spell, but just enough to give him a glimpse of the reward, so that he could take up his pen again with a vision of the grandeur of the task before him. Meanwhile, the idea had been mastered, and slowly it now took shape beneath his pen. Every now and then a passage would strike him as peculiarly exact, and he would experience a sort of exaltation to think that he himself, by the patient and deliberate choice of words, had achieved this perfection; or a particular word would startle him with its aptness, almost as if it were the outcome of a mysterious collaboration.

Catherine's stay at Marseilles was drawing to a close. It had been arranged that Madame de Laignes should come and fetch her daughter and that they should both stop at Lyons on the way home; and this suggested to Catherine a revival of their earlier plans. The journey being shorter, and therefore less expensive,

Michel could the more easily contrive to make it. He could put up at their own hotel in a room adjoining hers, and she would open her door to him under cover of night. But, as always, at the last moment the plan was wrecked. Catherine wrote to say that her mother had changed her mind and that now they would be returning direct to Saint-Loup. However, an indiscreet phrase in her next letter, a few days later, told Michel that not only had Catherine stayed two days at Lyons after all, but that she had also made, quite unaccompanied, a short journey to a little town in the vicinity to see a friend. In a flash Michel knew that he could no longer pretend she was anything but what she was—cowardly, egotistical, feeble, loving her own comfort more than she loved him: all of which was partly true. In his despair he straightway lit on a remedy that in cold blood he might never have thought of, and abruptly decided to shock her out of all chance of equivocation by writing to her direct instead of through the usual go-betweens: his letter, moreover, should bring her face to face with a clear-cut situation and force her categorically to state her choice.

Or so he imagined; but the outcome was not at all what he had hoped. Without concealing the desolation into which she had been plunged by what she regarded as a wanton attack, forgetting even to lie about it in her distress, she complained that he had acted as he did from pure spitefulness. What had he hoped to gain by writing to her direct? Simply to be disagreeable, to

make things unpleasant for her, to prove to himself as well as to others the extent of his dominion over her? Was this love? Did he ever hesitate for a moment to abuse her? Did anything but threats ever pass his lips? Sometimes, yes, he was very kind; but only when she had done what he wanted, only when he had had his own way with her. And then, to vary his sensations, to have the pleasure of being gentle and merciful sometimes, for a change ("And I suppose you think you're admirable, don't you? And really admire yourself?"), he would generously pardon her for all that he had made her endure! Now he was accusing her of stopping at Lyons when she had said she would not stop there. Could she have known she would be feeling ill when they got there, making it necessary to stop for a couple of days?

"You threaten me," she went on. "You say you are absolutely maddened! How pitiful! You would do better to say you love me. But I suppose you would hardly dare write that to me now?"

All the same, her explanations ran counter to the effect she intended to produce. If a slight indisposition had been enough to make them break their journey at Lyons, why couldn't she have thought in advance of pretending to be ill? But to this question she herself indirectly supplied the answer when she reproached Michel for wanting her to brave her mother for his sake, assuring him that if her mother had lighted on this letter, which by extraordinary good luck had come

straight into her own hands, she would never have written to him again.

Michel realized that the task he had imagined accomplished was scarcely yet begun, and he no longer thought of his novel now as he once had—as a means, that is to say, of touching and convincing Catherine. But the writer in him had been born, and survived the lover's disappointment. He seemed to move nowadays in a realm to which the noises of the world could not penetrate, incessantly revising his work, cutting, making improvements, adding passages of description or analysis, working at all times of the day and night and in the most varied places—in his father's study, sitting back in the big arm-chair and apparently doing nothing; in the drawing-room, making faces at his sister imperturbably practising her scales; on his walks. The description of the desolate beach was written on a seat in the avenue de Marigny opposite the gates of the Elysée. The description of the religious ceremony of Jeanne Rouves' wedding was done on top of a horse-tram on the way to Thisy. He had never been to a wedding, but he did not even need to make an effort to imagine such a thing—he simply saw it; and one after another the scenes of his story rose up between him and the familiar sights of the road now unrolling itself before his eyes.

When, on this occasion, he reached his destination and rang the bell, his head still humming with words and images, he was terrified lest his grandmother's

chatter should destroy the still tentative grouping of the sentences already roughed out in his mind. He replied, therefore, with careless haste to the flood of words which she welcomed him, and made off hurriedly in the direction of the lime walk. But that would not do at all for Madame Armelle. She started by trotting out to say that if he wanted any cherries the ladder was already in position against the trees, but he must look out for the second rung, which she had mended with steel wire with her own hands. Then she rushed off, imagining she smelt something burning in the kitchen; but in a minute she was back again, calmer now that she had assured herself that all was well. As she passed the gate she returned the greeting of a woman who was walking down the avenue.

"That was Madame Cuissard," she whispered to Michel, "the wife of one of the accountants at the Boulanger factory. Another who would like to come to my At Homes! If I liked, you know, I could have twenty people in my drawing-room every Friday. But I only like the best people. Now this Madame Cuissard you just saw, I met her only yesterday as I was coming back from market, pushing her baby in its pram with her own hands: *that* shows you, doesn't it? And she said to me, 'Good morning, *Madame Armelle*'—as if anybody ever addresses a person by name, like that! She ought to have said, 'Good morning, Madame, how warm it is today!' or some little remark of that kind. But no, 'Good morning, *Madame Armelle*!' So I just

bowed and said: 'Good morning, Madame, are you giving your baby an airing?' "

Never stopping in her chatter, she followed Michel back to the house and on to the veranda. He looked around, picked up an inkpot from the flap of the little bureau, and asked his grandmother for a few sheets of writing-paper.

"What for, paper?" Madame Armelle cautiously enquired.

"To write a few paragraphs of my novel on."

"Ah! Well, well, well, well, well!" cried Madame Armelle. "I just thought I would ask, you see. . . ."

And, disappearing into her room, she emerged a moment later with a large ledger which had been Monsieur Armelle's account book.

"There you are," she said, "you see there are plenty of empty pages still. Tear out what you want. Then I'll put the book in the cupboard by the chest of drawers, and whenever you want paper to scribble your bits of nonsense on you'll know where to find it." Then, noticing the book that Michel had laid on the table, she read out the title syllable by syllable:

"*Madame Bovary*. . . . Aha! You're as bad as Jules" (that was the name of a one-time boarder at the Lycée de Dompierre, whom she had taken out in holiday-time). "You like *Madame Bovary*. But Jules, you know, used to read other books far dirtier than *Madame Bovary*. He used to buy them on his

way back to school, or have them brought him by the day-boys. He might have been expelled for it. So I said, 'Bring all the books you like here, even the most disgusting ones. Ah, bah! what do I care? You can put them in the bottom of the cupboard, keep the key, and when you want to indulge your taste for filth you have only to unlock the door.'"

Pursued by sordidness even in the solitude he had sought, Michel, without replying, dipped his pen into the ink, collected his thoughts, and began to write:

The triumphant crashings of the organ echoed and re-echoed down the aisles.

The great cathedral opened out before her, lofty and immense, and a narrow track of interminable red carpet stretched away between the chairs of the nave until it ended in the shadows of the distant altar with its burning candles.

She walked some paces ahead of her retinue, who followed carefully, keeping their proper distances. Her white veil billowed out about her as she walked slowly forward; her eyes beneath the veil were dilated, her lips parted. At every step the toes of her tiny slippers peeped from beneath her dress, first one, then the other, white on the bright red carpet. At each step, also, the weight of the long train dragging at her dress outlined the front of her thigh and broke from girdle to hem in a great, shadowed cleft. Jeanne felt herself half-fainting in this warm and incense-laden air; at times she closed her eyes.

When she opened them again it was as though her veil were stretched over everything around her, and her head whirled with the strangeness of it. The crowd of guests

wavered about her, touched here and there by the shafts of light that poured in from the windows of the aisle, outlining the columns. Far away . . .

At this moment Madame Armelle put her head out through the kitchen-door.

"Now," she said, "let's be serious for a moment. Do you or don't you like milk in your pumpkin soup?"

IT WAS EVENING, in Michel's room. That very day he had written *Finis* to the last page of his manuscript. It lay now on his table, a thick exercise-book wrapped round in a sheet of white paper on which the title stood out in large letters: "The Conquest of Life." How much energy, how many hopes, lay behind those four words! And, contemplating them, he tried to imagine how the book would look when it was printed and bound, and how he would feel on first seeing it in a book-seller's window. His dreaming was interrupted by the ringing of the door-bell. It was Lavarenne. He, like the others, knew that Michel was writing a novel, but Michel never discussed it at all, and, except for the subject, they knew nothing about it.

This evening, however, incapable of talking of anything else, Michel himself brought it up.

"I've just finished 'The Conquest of Life,'" he remarked, by way of informing Lavarenne of the title.

He hesitated a moment, divided between a desire to share his excitement and a sort of shrinking shyness at the idea of submitting to another's judgement what no one yet had seen but himself.

Then: "Shall I read you a bit of it?" he asked at length, as casually as possible.

Lavarenne assented with a broad grin of ironical deference. Then, his curiosity awakened, and anticipating plenty of employment for his critical faculties, he settled himself in Michel's arm-chair with an air of exaggerated comfort.

Slowly Michel opened his manuscript and turned the pages, lingering over them as one lingers over the last details of a small child's first preparations for school, deferring the final moment of departure. At length, having decided on a passage to read, he began with a slightly forced animation to explain the general situation.

"I won't read you the opening chapter. The scene is set in Saint-Vallier, where Jeanne Rouves lives, and shows the sort of life she leads. It is a tea-party at the house of one of her friends. They discuss happiness over tea; after that there is some singing—hymns, if you can believe it! Then a ballad or two. . . . You get the idea? . . ."

Lavarenne nodded without answering, his face creasing into another sardonic smile.

"In chapter two," Michel went on, "she is at the sea-side, and there she meets the man she's going to fall in love with. His name's Bernard. I'll begin now. It's an evening walk."

Jeanne walked alone behind the laughing groups; they made dark patches on the road before her, and the moon

shone on the slow waves, and a strange, delicious emotion overcame her.

One evening Bernard came and walked beside her, and beneath the poetry of the night the banality of their usual conversation imperceptibly gave place to a more genuine kind of talk. And it filled them with wonder to think they should have been together all this time and never noticed the similarity of taste and thought that they discovered now.

She was walking rather slowly, and he adapted his pace to hers. And every time he raised or lowered his head his eyes were lost in the shadow of his hat or were suddenly brilliant, gleaming in the moonlight. At such moments his face had a fascinating pallor, and his shining eyes seemed to be expressing even more intimacy than the words he uttered.

They walked along in the shadow of the bushes which threw a black edging all down the road. Now and again a breath of wind would stir these and set up a faint rustling of leaves, bringing with it waves of fragrance that filled them with a sort of indolence in which speech became more delicious, intimacy closer. And with every step they took forward this intimacy seemed to become more firmly established until they soon had the feeling that they had known each other for ever.

A bend in the road separated them for a moment from the others, and the illusion of being alone together enhanced their intimacy.

When Jeanne went out next day she met Bernard again. It seemed they were both bound for the post, so they walked there together. Beyond the trailing thorn-bushes at either side of the road were rows of white-washed villas, each doorway boasting a little coloured plaque with the name of a saint on it. In some of the villas lunch was already

in progress, and through open windows they could glimpse women in light frocks and men in white jackets turning to look at them as they went by.

The sun was at its height, and Jeanne opened her sunshade. There was no sound but the crunch of their footsteps, the tenderness of the words they exchanged.

They spoke of Saint-Vallier, of Paris, of the country. Now and then Jeanne would transfer her sunshade to the hand which was already holding up her skirt and stretch up her arm to pick a blackberry, standing on tip-toe and revealing her ankles. As she craned forward her neck emerged from the knot of white ribbons that tied her cloak, whose laces were all confused upon her shoulders with the embroidery of her dress.

Then with little tiny bites, lips wrinkled back, she nibbled the fruit she had picked, reddening teeth and finger-tips. Once a blackberry fell on to the white ribbons and made a mark. Handing her sunshade to her companion, Jeanne took out her handkerchief and dabbed at the little stain. And suddenly, overcome by the presence of this young man so close beside her, she began to laugh to cover her embarrassment.

They talked again about Saint-Vallier, and Jeanne described the monotony of her life. But even as she spoke that life seemed to fade and fade until she could hardly believe it had ever really existed.

A deeper enchantment stirred beneath this intimate talk; the very phrases they used set something a-tingle in them, so that a single word could set up vibrations so faint as to be imperceptible, so delicious as to make them shiver.

When they said good-bye, Jeanne held out her hand. And at the touch of his fingers their two beings seemed to merge, and a gentle languor fell upon them and touched

everything about them, and the sky seemed like a brooding spirit above them, where strange winds strayed.

Michel found Lavarenne's unexpected silence somehow more daunting than interruptions and criticism, and read at first with considerable embarrassment, mumbling, his eyes fixed on the page. Presently, however, the rhythm of what he was reading began to reassure him, and his voice had recovered its pitch when he heard, through the sound of his own voice, fragmentary words:

"Marvellous! Amazing!"

He hardly dared believe his ears, and only a sudden strange feeling of warmth conveyed the sense of what he had heard to his brain: without pausing in his reading he glanced furtively at Lavarenne, whose appearance was certainly strange: he was breathing heavily and rolling his eyes as though suffocating; his emotion was unmistakable.

Thus, when he stopped reading, it was with more than a touch of naïve triumph that Michel demanded—not so much to know what his friend was thinking as to hear him put it into words:—

"Well?"

Lavarenne did not attempt to conceal his feelings, but continued to exclaim:

"Amazing, absolutely amazing!"

"Not much like my stuff for *Receuil*!" said Michel, and added, with a certain authority now: "I'll read you another bit that's not so bad either. . . . You must

know that Madame Rouves was always suspecting something or someone. She began to watch those two. But they found a way to meet every morning when that highly respectable and devout lady had gone to pray in church."

Jeanne would put on her hat and run down the steps; Bernard would be passing as if by chance; they would escape together. But how short those hours were! They would wander along the cliffs and often stop at the little coastguards' cabin and sit down on the bench beneath the overhanging roof. Bushes cut off their view of the sea, and all they could make out of it was a faint, far-off line, high up in the sky. From where they sat they looked down on the village, whose chalets shone among the dark brambles edging the lanes.

And they often read together up there in their solitude, pausing now and again to talk.

The little wild purple campanulas growing on the sloping roof nodded gaily in the wind and threw their shadows on the pages of the book, slightly blurring the lines of print. Jeanne read, her head bent, and the black satin ribbon round her neck, that made her skin seem fairer, creased into shining folds. Her lips moved, revealing white teeth, and her throat swelled a little with the slow and gentle undulation of a dove's.

Now and then a stronger gust would blow in from the sea and through the bushes, shaking the little campanula bells, which would nod more vigorously; and sometimes a blossom would drop on to Jeanne's knees.

She would laugh, with her hair blowing about her face and the pages of the book rustling and fluttering over; and she would lean forward a little and keep the pages open

with her elbow while with one hand she tucked away the flying strands of hair. The breeze would die down gently and they would talk a little before returning to their reading.

It was absolutely still. The roads were empty, the sea was dazzling. Love was the pivot upon which speech hung, and the few words they exchanged were like a storm which drove them ever closer together as it approached.

They asked no more than this of their talks and readings together: to prove more utterly, more intimately still, their mutual sympathy.—In the silence the soft lapping of the sea was audible, and it seemed to them that their own hearts echoed that grave and tender murmuring, and were joined in one.

Michel paused, and turned a few pages; then, as Lavarenne said nothing, he went on: "This is Jeanne and Bernard out for a row one evening: they don't know that Madame Rouves, determined to separate them, has already arranged to leave next day, and that this is the last time they will see each other."

They were off. Willing hands pushed them—an oar—and the boat slowly took the water, and the two sailors began to row steadily, away from the laughter and the laughing voices. The moon was visible above the trees now and shone on the semicircular sweep of the bay. Further off, the windows of villas glittered in the moonlight; but near at hand they were still in shadow, and the yellow glow of lamps could be made out within.

A lengthening wave flowed away on either side of the bows and became merely a little foam along the side of the boat.

Jeanne and Bernard sat close together, forward; so narrow was the seat that their bodies touched. The mast, and even more the rowers, whose backs alone were visible, seemed to cut them off and hide them completely.

Jeanne put her hands on the gunwale, rested her chin on them, and stared down at the glittering waves streaking by. Now and again she closed her eyes and drew in great breaths of the pure, illimitable night air. Something stirred deep within her, too deep to grasp. She half-opened her eyes again; the horizon swam between her lashes in a sort of mist of sky, stars, and waves. She wished passionately it might always be thus. A mist was rising, trailing long wreaths of bluish vapour, and little clouds were forming in the sky.

And suddenly, for the first time in her life, Jeanne thought of the future. She felt as if she were looking down into a great black empty pit, where there was nothing to be seen—and no possibility of throwing down blazing bits of paper, as one did down the shafts of old dungeons to light up the walls.

At this point, the tea which Michel had ordered on Lavarenne's arrival was brought in. And while he poured out there was a short pause during which they exchanged a few trivial remarks, like opponents who declare a truce and put off until later the broaching of a difficult subject. Then, setting down his empty cup, Michel turned again to the reading. In a few words he sketched in what happened next—the abrupt return to Saint-Vallier, to the old life, just as it had been before the holidays. But the friendships that had satisfied her

before were empty now, and Jeanne lived, hopelessly, in thoughts of the past.

"Here—this page shows how she's feeling. It's a gloomy winter afternoon; her mother has gone out, and she's alone in her room."

The town seemed to stretch out endlessly before her in all its melancholy. It was snowing. The low houses on the other side of the avenue were being slowly covered with snow. Nothing stirred; not a soul was abroad. . . . Jeanne felt her brain begin to whirl too. All that she had been seemed spinning away in the soft, incessant downfall; each flake was a grief, a shattered hope, and the snow thickened upon the earth as monotony choked her life.

A figure crossed the square with hurrying footsteps. A cart turned out of a side road into it. The horse jogged along with head hanging low, a poor automaton nothing could move. The low sky seemed to deaden the jingling of the little bells on its collar. Jeanne recognized it as the baker's cart and clasped her hands together and burst into tears. Such wretchedness. O God, she was so wretched! She sat down, her elbows on her knees, her face buried in her hands, like an old woman, and the tears trickled through her fingers. And yet how she longed for life!

The bell rang suddenly in the hall; she started violently, sprang to her feet, listening motionless, full of an incredible hope. Who was it? Who could it possibly be?

She heard Madame Provent's voice speaking, and a wave of black despair swept over her and left her shattered.

"But this period," Michel went on, "was succeeded by another, very different, in which her only desire was for more and more balls, parties, amusements.

You can imagine how delighted Madame Rouves was with the change."

She loved the intoxication of violins, the swoon of waltzes, the whirl of quadrilles. She loved to cross the floor on the arm of a smiling escort, to feel that perfumed atmosphere all round her, to hear the faint breath of discreet music. She loved to stretch out her white-gloved hand and delicately take up a crystal glass of golden wine, and smile, half-closing her eyes, and drink deeply of the sparkling liquid. The bubbles rose continually and burst against her lips, tickling a little. And the tears would come into her eyes, and she would set the glass down on the table for a moment, still clasping it, and her teeth would glisten moistly between her parted lips. A waltz would strike up and they would return to the ballroom to dance; she loved the rustle of her skirt as she moved.

And towards morning, when the candles guttered and the air was heavy, she would go home.

Day would hardly be breaking as, with eyelids fluttering with weariness, she got home at last and fell at once into a feverish sleep. Or it might be she could not sleep at all, but lay listening to the first carts clattering down the street.

Only once, as she was dancing, did she remember Bernard. But the memory passed like a flight of herons across a wintry sky. And that was all.

Lavarenne sat motionless, his eyes shaded behind his large hand, his legs crossed. The only sign of life in him was that one foot twitched ceaselessly, convulsively.

"Shall I go on reading?" asked Michel at length,

afraid now of wearying his audience with this prolonged session.

But Lavarenne, as if he had been interrupted himself, cried out sharply, almost feverishly:

"Go on, go on!"

Michel began reading again.

Jeanne began to doubt. And she resolved to get to the bottom of the world about her, to test the reality of its ideas and facts, and plumb their causes. She conceived of a mysterious state to which her soul aspired, and dreamed that to attain to it would fill to overflowing the cup of her desire. But very soon this ideal appeared unrealizable, and she found her mind faltering even in contemplation of it: she turned giddily to the image of that lost friend . . . and at once her mother's face appeared before her, menacing, smiling. The task was too great: the ideal she had dreamed of was beyond her, a book presented to childish eyes that cannot yet read: she longed for a guide, a teacher, and shrank appalled before the emptiness of her life, like a fluttering, captured bird.

And every day Jeanne and Madame Rouves went to Saint-Pierre, exactly as they had gone the day before, exactly as they would go the day following. They walked down the avenue, up the rue Notre Dame, and at the corner of the little alley-way leading to the cathedral gave their usual *sou* to the beggar who was always stationed there. They entered and knelt. Sunlight streamed in through the open doors, bringing with it the fragrance of nearby gardens. Swallows flown in from the porch chased each other, now frantically whirring their wings, now boldly wheeling and looping the golds and purples of the windows, now lost in shadowy corners. And Jeanne, like the swallows, felt that

a breath of summer still penetrated to her prison, and a memory of happier days. But would she ever find the open door, and the broad skies of freedom?

Michel skipped a page or two—a description of provincial life, where day succeeds monotonous day and nothing ever happens. But now the holidays again drew near.

One day it occurred to her that perhaps she would see him again, and this roused her to an almost unbearable pitch of anticipation and hope. It was like a light on the horizon, so long despaired of that its appearance at last seems no more than an illusion. But none of this passionate eagerness appeared in her daily life, which was as monotonous as ever, as though before its time fallen into old age.

Bernard's image was her only consolation. All her life was centred on him. He became for her the ending of all sorrows, the source of all joys, his love tenderer than a mother's, pervasive as a fragrance. His love was a cool stream in which she bathed her soul. But sometimes, knowing the frailty of her dream, she was seized with terror.

"Well," said Michel, "there could be no doubt of the ultimate result—knowing any mother, knowing Madame Rouves in particular. She had decided that Jeanne and Bernard must never meet again; so they took their holidays at a little fishing-village in Brittany, where they were quite alone. And Heaven rewarded Madame Rouves' efforts. For her daughter was all that could be desired. She worked at her little tasks

beside her; they looked for pretty shells together, or together made excursions. Unfortunately"—and here Michel lifted up his hands, shook his head, opened his eyes and dropped his jaw in the sort of lugubrious grimace he imagined Madame Rouves would make on such an occasion—"unfortunately the infatuated creature went off sometimes by herself. But such moments of depression and regret became more and more infrequent, and finally ceased altogether; and mother and daughter returned to Saint-Vallier in perfect accord. I won't weary you with Jeanne's gradual demoralization, her inner capitulation. I'll go straight on from her meeting with Monsieur Lagardenne."

At the sound of this name Lavarenne sharply broke his long silence, as though glad of a chance to relax:

"What's this, what's this?" he exclaimed in mock anger. "That's too much like Lavarenne! And he isn't the hero, either. I protest!"

Michel answered, laughingly too:

"He's not like you at all. Here he is."

Everything about him was correct: he had all the air of a man who knows how to reconcile this world with the next. His close-set eyes were yellowish and bright, the whites streaked with tiny red veins; and when he smiled the skin of his eyelids, with their scanty lashes, wrinkled. His teeth, stained, yellow and widely-spaced, showed beneath lips which were continually moistened by a dark and apoplectic-looking tongue, one of those tongues that relish champagne, truffles, women and chastisement.

“Very well, this charming young suitor—I should add that he is rather tall, much to Madame Rouves’ delight, and already has a bit of a corporation—is accepted by Jeanne. They are engaged. And having thus obeyed her mother—obedience to parents is always rewarded, of course—Jeanne is entirely happy, or ought to be.”

Jeanne came and went in a kind of horrible dream. Sometimes she seemed to hear a plaintive wailing deep within her soul, and she shivered with terror, like a child pressing its ear to the rough wood of a telegraph-pole and hearing the eerie lamentation of unknown spirits.

And then her frozen torpor would be rent by wild crises of half-crazed panic, coming upon her like the sudden hot wind that heralds a storm, and whipping the terrors of her brain into livid waves, shaking the very foundations of her being, and leaving her racked with uncertainty and grief.

So violent was her suffering that at times it seemed to be something apart from herself, vast, powerful, overwhelming her own poor little life, so uncertain now, and watching with stupefaction this squandering of her soul. Doubts beset her again, more torturing now because more personal, until her brain whirled and she could have cried aloud for mercy. Or she was shaken by horrible sensations of terror and cold and could have groaned with misery.

At such moments she longed for final and complete peace—not to have to live any longer, or think, or, above all, suffer. She dreamed interminably of such a peaceful life, a life that doubtless never would be hers; and, so dreaming, fell again into a stupor, a paralysis of thought. She was no more than an inert body, without thought, intelligence or feeling. Nothing could affect her any more. Nothing mattered: all was over. Perhaps she was really dead; she

didn't know. She no longer desired not to suffer, for she no longer suffered, or to think, for she no longer thought. All she wanted was to go to bed and lie and count the roses on the wallpaper.

Michel knew every inflection of every sentence he read, and yet in spite of himself he was kindled, and read on without a pause, almost for his own pleasure, and half-forgetting that Lavarenne was listening.

The wedding was to take place next day. Jeanne Rouves was sitting lost in dreams, looking back in memory over her life. But her mother heard her pulling out the drawers of her desk and knocked on the wall and cried:

"You'll be so tired to-morrow!"

And here Michel, as if he was himself in that room and afraid of being overheard, lowered his voice and read on with an emotion that was heightened by the fact that this was one of the two passages he had lifted almost word for word from letters Catherine had written him.

Jeanne tiptoed back to her arm-chair, almost brushing against the going-away dress spread out on her trunk. She turned up the lamp a little, settled her feet on a hassock, and placed the drawer on her knees. The shaded lamp illumined her face softly and shed a rosy glow all round her: the rest of the room was in shadow.

She rummaged in the contents of the drawer with both hands, and more than ever realized the chaos of her own life. Here were newspaper-cuttings about plays that had interested her, letters from friends and relations, ribbons,

mementoes of every kind, little prayers of proved efficacy, and a flower Bernard had once given her, carefully treasured in an envelope.

She made a bonfire of all these reminders of the past—a flame, a thread of smoke, a few ashes. And watching them she felt her heart grow gradually, shudderingly, calmer, as the ripples spread ever more faintly on a lake whose calm surface has been broken by a stone. But an oppression remained, a darkness that grew and grew, until all her girlhood, all her love and grief, appeared at last in sombre hues, lit only by such livid gleams as a storm will strike from the windows of abandoned houses.

At length she moved a little, and saw her wedding-dress all ready for the morrow. She shut her eyes and clenched her hands: that dress frightened her. Mechanically she rose and went to the window; the moon shone in a great pale lunar halo, presaging rain.

Her sleep was tormented by nightmares. She dreamed it was the end of the world. Stars fell: people rushed into the churches: in her dread and terror she went everywhere seeking Bernard. She was lost, irretrievably lost. The moon fell in ruins to earth and began to strike like a clock, sounding the passing of the hours that still remained. Time shrank and shrank, and still she could not find him.

The white dress stirred mysteriously in the morning light, like a living thing.

The next chapter was the wedding itself. Michel had just finished the description of the church ceremony and got to the wedding-dinner when the clock struck midnight; feeling sure that Lavarenne must be going to interrupt him at last, and hastening to forestall him, Michel remarked on the lateness of the hour and

proposed to stop. And Lavarenne's reply pleased him better than any amount of praise, when he answered that the time didn't matter, he wanted to know how it ended.

"Where was I?" murmured Michel, glancing down the page.

The dinner went on, and Jeanne grew paler and paler, and her eyes grew larger; so tired, now, that she was hardly aware of what was going on about her. A shadow seemed to lie over the assembled guests; circles of light burned tremblingly in it, and from them gushed perpetual strings of tiny fiery bubbles.

Now and again her husband spoke to her. His fingers, lips, and protuberant stomach all seemed to loom over her together, and her eyes opened still wider. In the midst of the stifling heat the lobes of her ears suddenly seemed of an extraordinary heaviness. She plunged her burning lips into the water of her glass, but this heightened rather than allayed her fever. And as she raised her hand to drink the dazzle of her rings caught her eye and seemed to pierce her brain like a barbed and tiny arrow.

There was a horrible throbbing in her head, and her body felt light, light. All round her she saw gaily dressed strangers, old ladies in black satin, priests in their black cassocks, all the people who had arranged the life she was to live; and an immense sadness overcame her as she looked back on the happiness that had been hers.

At this moment Madame Rouves caught her guests' eyes, and all the ladies rose as the doors were flung open.

Far from recovering from his initial surprise, Lavarenne became more and more astonished as one

chapter succeeded another. He remembered Michel's early efforts, the absurd sentimentality, the adjective-swollen style, the clichés, that had often aroused his own good-natured criticism. Widely read as he was, he saw soon enough the influences at work in what was being read to him; but he could not see how such a change had come about in so short a time.

Meanwhile the story held his attention irresistibly. He saw Jeanne Rouves set out, saw her get into the train, arrive at Paris, enter the flat where she was to live in future.

Michel's voice adjusted itself to all the horror and pathos of the situation.

There was a smell of paint and paper-hanging, and a lamp was lit on a table.

Monsieur Lagardenne led the way down a long, carpeted corridor and showed Jeanne her room, postponing inspection of the flat until to-morrow.

A bright fire burned in the grate, everything was fresh and attractive, and Jeanne saw two pillows on a large double bed.

"Here is your dressing-case," said Monsieur Lagardenne. "I will leave you now, my dear. My room is here, beside yours. Call me when you're ready. And if you want anything you'll ring for the maid, won't you?"

And he smiled and left her.

She went to the window and pulled aside a curtain; she could just make out a narrow courtyard, surrounded by tall, melancholy houses. She turned and looked back again at the room and noticed a crucifix above the draperies of the alcove.

And again she saw those two pillows, and everything blurred and swam about her. The floor began to heave slowly up and down as it does when one has been pirouetting too long, and she had a sudden, confused recollection of feeling much like this when, as a child, she had made herself giddy trying to give her frock the graceful swing of a paste-board dancer's pink paper skirts.

Shuddering, she undressed; unclasped her bodice, let fall her skirt, pulled off her shoes and chafed her icy feet with her hands. Then she took out the nightdress that had been neatly packed in her valise and crept into the cold bed, her teeth chattering. Suddenly she remembered what he had said: she must call him, then. But what for? She tried to persuade herself that it would be merely to wish her goodnight, ask if there was anything she wanted, kiss her perhaps, as he had already done. But she knew very well it wasn't just for that, that there was something else of which she knew nothing except that it would be abominable.

Her trembling wrists no longer supported her shrinking body as she sat up in bed, and she sank back, half senseless. Stupor overcame her, and a vast weight seemed to press down upon her breast.

She did not hear her husband's discreet knock on the door, nor see him as he appeared on the threshold in his shirt and underpants. . . .

Lavarenne interrupted—but it was less an interruption than a confirmation: in biting tones that echoed Michel's own he muttered fiercely:

"Yes, black silk pants!"

Michel signalled approval with his eyebrows, made the correction in his manuscript, and went on:

. . . shirt and black silk under-pants, and walked over to the bed where his wife awaited him. She lay with her face to the wall. He looked at her with a strange emotion.

A coal fell suddenly on the hearth and a red ember rolled out on to the carpet. Monsieur Lagardenne picked it up with the tongs and replaced it.

Jeanne turned at the sound. He was sitting on the chair at the foot of the bed and appeared to be undressing. The mattress seemed to heave slowly beneath her, slowly, and then faster and faster, as one rocks a baby's cradle. She cowered against the wall. When she felt the sheets pulled back and this stranger climb into bed beside her it seemed as though a thousand arrows pierced her heart, her breast, her brain; and suddenly, with extraordinary vividness, she saw a little smiling rosy face appear in the shadows round her; her mother's face. It grew and grew until its smile filled the livid darkness.

Her whole being protested against the blind terror that seized her; she sobbed lamentably; then shrieked as he approached her, and struggled. In her distress and physical revulsion it all seemed a horrible nightmare in which she struggled madly, and in the midst of which her mother's face looked down and smiled, and smiled.

"But my dear child, my dear child!" panted Monsieur Lagardenne.

She tore herself from his embrace. And when he pursued her she struck viciously at the lips that sought hers and threw herself out of bed; standing there on the carpet she reiterated senselessly:

"It's too beastly, too beastly, too beastly. . . ."

"But Jeanne, my dear child!" he stammered, wiping his lips. And he threw aside the entangling sheets.

Madly she seized her scattered clothes, fled into the other room, locked herself in.

Monsieur Lagardenne swore angrily and jumped out of bed.

"Last chapter," Michel announced.

The key turned in the lock. Jeanne sighed in an agony of relief. But she continued to mutter over and over again, "How beastly, how beastly. . . ." Trembling with fright and cold, she advanced with groping, outstretched arms, tripping over her dangling clothes, until she was brought up short against a wall. She felt curtains under her hands, and clutched them. Deep sobs shook her breast. She felt as though she were falling through illimitable space, she felt the rush of air against her body, she heard herself cry out.

"But look here, Jeanne, look here!" Monsieur Lagardenne was calling indistinctly from the next room.

She did not hear, did not understand, rather: only the sound of his voice made her shrink more closely against the curtains. Her hair was falling over her shoulders, and in the darkness, scarcely lightened by the dim outline of a window, she was only a white shape shaken by shudder on shudder.

But her head began to nod gently, and one hand began to beat time to an unseen orchestra: a waltz, a waltz! She left the ballroom and went out into the corridor: it was empty, and she paused a moment to listen to the eddying music and to arrange her heavy train. Then she turned to the stairs and ascended, step by step, pausing at every step: her dress rustled and the lace of her sleeve fell over one hand. Snatches of conversation came up to her, and high overhead the wind rattled the chimney cowling. She leaned against the window and heard her mother's voice.

She shuddered with horror, almost with hatred—and found herself back in the room where she had taken refuge,

alone in the faint, melancholy light of dawn. She looked round her. There was a pair of trousers over a chair, a table covered with books, and in the middle of the mantelpiece a marble clock. It was just after three. At this moment, she thought, her mother at home would be saying good-bye to the last guests. But here everything was so dreary, so immeasurably dreary in the wan light that drained the velvet upholstery of its colour, that she began to find it almost reassuring.

Monsieur Lagardenne having given her his word, she dressed and opened the door. The scene that followed was the climax of the book, modelled on the great scene in *La Révolte*. But in spite of the relationship their differences were very clear.

Monsieur Lagardenne now said:

"Couldn't I be the man to kindle in you that love of which you dream?"

And to that she answered:

"No. That can never be. I love already. Nor could you ever give what I demand . . . I offer you my virginity itself; you bring me the dregs of life. Strangers as we are, a single night is enough to show the impossibility of our union. I am all eagerness for life, for everything it offers; but your soul is petrified and your heart is dead. I am young, I am pure—oh, infinitely! I have guarded my senses jealously, with all a woman's passion, for the husband I should have loved. What can you give me to compare with that? It is true that you have known life. . . . But what is that to me? I did not ask that my husband should know

life. There would have been something new and ineffaceable between us.

"I know now what I have always desired. I wanted him to be as innocent as I am, to share my chastity. And together, at one in heart and mind, at one in youthfulness, we should have looked steadily at life and learnt to see it as it is—together. . . . Oh, I know that these truths have a beauty which you can never understand! But I understand it now—now when it is too late! And it is thus that I should have always wished to live!"

All that was said in this speech Lavarenne remembered hearing often enough from Michel, but here it appeared in its full significance. In his heart of hearts he too had nourished such dreams, such desires; he too had dreamed of a great love and would have kept himself for her whom he still awaited. And now it was as though he himself was that man whom Jeanne Rouves had spurned, from whose unworthiness she had turned away. . . . And when she decided where her real duty lay and refused to compromise in any way, determined only to leave him, then he could hardly restrain a sigh of relief, and his overburdened heart felt positively lightened, as if it was he whom she was to find at the end of the path she had chosen:

The stairs were dark, and her hand squeaked on the varnished wood. She went down slowly, step by step, in the deepest dejection of spirit. Where was she going? Paris was vast and to her all unknown. Once again, but for the last time, she nearly hesitated. Frightened as she was, she began to think to herself: I am going downstairs, I am

going to ring; the door will be opened for me and I shall find myself out in the street. Where shall I go? How shall I manage for food? What will become of me?

She had reached the hall now; she stood before the door, beneath which showed a thin crack of light. She went out.

The mist had dispersed a little. The sky was neither light nor dark, but universal grey, tinged with a lowering yellow and shot with sharp, faint, gleams of light. The street was silent. Only a few lamps still burned. No one was about. The mist chilled her to the bone. She stood for a long time outside the door there, bewildered, her hands pressed to her lips. How cold she was!

Suddenly, like a tidal wave running in from the sea to flood an estuary, a sweeping, glistening surge seemed to inundate her very being, a wave from the misty seas of memory, which for a moment drowned the present. And this tremendous roller passed over her without a shudder, and broke and ran to foam. From this she picked a memory. . . .

She was leaning over the gunwale of the boat, looking down into the water slipping past. Now and again she closed her eyes and drew in great breaths of the pure, illimitable night air. Then she half-opened her eyes again, and the horizon swam between her lashes in a sort of mist of sky, stars and waves. She wished passionately it might be always thus.

Bernard came and leant beside her, and spoke to her. Their hands came together, and a dazzling brightness descended upon them. But a voice was calling now: her mother's voice. She moved away. She seemed to herself to be struggling in a damp, imponderable net.

By slow degrees the scene changed, and Jeanne forgot that past sorrow for the meagre present that seemed to lie in wait for her amid the swirling mist.

And a kind of horror overcame her at the thought that what is called the human soul can thus change from day to day until it has lost all touch with its own past, existing only from one moment to the next, varying from second to second, a new life for every second: in her terror and despair she thought, I am going mad. Her body, with all its wretchedness, seemed no more than the passive instrument of an unknown force. Ceaselessly changing, it watched the ceaseless evolution of her soul. There was no such thing as herself. Only a kind of thought that dwelt within her body and watched the days go by.

Her soul was refined away by too acute complexities. Her brain was exacerbated by the ceaseless revolution of infinitesimal subtleties. Ideas crowded in upon her, one cancelling another; arguments fought with one another, in a perpetual descent towards the infinitely small, the infinitely microscopic. And all that happened was that the same hesitations shrank back into crazy and imponderable minutiae.

Then, suddenly, this breath of folly was sweeping through her soul in precisely the reverse direction, now expanding her faculties and projecting them into the infinite. Her whole being was shaken by a tempest of horror and dread; she panicked, distracted, in a sort of hallucinated desperation.

Her life was suddenly infinitely multiplied. It seemed to her to comprehend in a milliard existences an immensity of shame, an immensity of disgust, an immensity of suffering, an immensity of desire, desire for the ideal, the ideal in all things. It seemed to her to contain the whole of life, this brief and grievous life that aspires to a better state and strives even now to realize it. Beneath this terrifying revelation her soul was consumed. Her body trembled with all the sufferings incarnate in her. Doubt spread all its horror before her frightened eyes.

And in the dark, vertiginous abyss she saw lost beliefs, lost human and religious certitudes, lie broken. Beneath this dreadful shock she thought she would die. Her eyes wandered in the infinite.

Then there came a dazzlement so tremendous that she staggered, so resplendent that she clasped her hands before it. The doleful plaints of her sufferings, her revulsions, the terrors of her stricken spirit, were as nothing. Softly she began to weep. Oh, peace . . . the wind of life gently fluttered the veils of her soul, and there came to her that tranquillity she had so long sought in vain.

"O light, O light . . ." she murmured.

And she smiled, with tenderness.

No, she murmured again, I am not dead. I was not fated to die thus, I shall live and I shall play my woman's part. I know he is still waiting; I know it—sadly and alone. And I am going back to him; I am going to be a joyous companion to him, a beloved wife. Together we shall be great and strong. In his strength I shall plunge my soul. There are truths in me that we shall realize together. My suffering shall be of use to him. He shall be the apostle of a new world!

For a moment she bent beneath the burden of harvests to come, as the sheaf bows beneath its weight of grain.

Dawn was breaking. She turned and walked away.

Michel stopped. He had a sudden feeling of giddiness, like a man come suddenly to the edge of an abyss. There was a moment's silence. Then he raised his eyes and looked across at Lavarenne.

"Well?" he said at length, as he had already said so much earlier in the evening.

Lavarenne got up as if in a daze, took his hat and

coat from the chair beside him, and prepared to depart, without even attempting to conceal his haste.

"I'm going," he said. "No, I can't say anything to-night. I should never be able to stop. . . . I've got to think about it all. . . . I'm flabbergasted. . . . Tomorrow. . . . I'll tell you all about it tomorrow. . . . Good-night. . . . Yes, tomorrow!"

And he strode out of the room, down the passage, across the hall; he opened the door, shook hands hurriedly with Michel as if only concerned with getting away, and clattered downstairs, muttering unintelligibly as he went. Michel stood there holding out the lamp over the banisters until he vanished round the turn of the stairs. And suddenly, as the footsteps clattered further down into the darkness, the muttering voice became more distinct and Michel could make out the words. An extraordinary, an intoxicating joy overcame him as he realized what they were, a joy like nothing he had ever experienced, that ran over him from head to foot like a bath of fire: as he went on and on downstairs Lavarenne was muttering over and over to himself in tones of absolute stupefaction tinged with a kind of despair:

"Good God, good God, good God . . . !"

He turned up next day at two o'clock. Michel expected him to burst out enthusiastically at once about that reading. But he was disappointed. Lavarenne greeted him as usual, and a faint trace of embarrassment that had been visible on his first appearance soon disap-

peared in the busy volubility with which he started describing his latest row with his grandparents. Doubtless—and only a sort of shyness kept Michel from pressing him—he would give his opinion all in good time. But the day finished without the matter being so much as touched on. Astonished and a little hurt, Michel decided that perhaps he was composing his ideas on the subject in the form of a written criticism, as he had so often done in the days of *Receuil*. Several days went by, a whole week, and nothing happened. Lavarenne might have forgotten both reading and book. He never referred to it again.

AUGUST WAS DRAWING NEAR, but Catherine knew very well that this time the holidays would not allow them to meet, for it was an understood thing that if the Varambauds went to Saint-Guénolé again Madame de Laignes would go elsewhere. But where would that be? What seaside town or inland watering-place would she choose? Without exactly admitting that the thought of the distractions she would find there was not unpleasing, Catherine told herself that she would have liked to go back to Saint-Guénolé even if they could not be together there. It seemed to her that she would feel less lonely in the midst of all their common memories. But what would Michel say? Not knowing in the least how he would take it, she managed to get the question in in passing, as it were, ingenuously asking:

“What would you say if I were to go to Saint-Guénolé?”

To Michel's immediate and categorical refusal she replied that of course she would not go if he did not wish her to, immediately qualifying this declaration of obedience by proceeding to explain her reasons for wanting to go. There was nothing she dreaded so much as to find herself alone in a strange place. Down there

she would feel closer to him. With what joy, moreover, would she look once more upon those places which held for them both the most painful but also the most precious memories of their lives!

Her underhand insistence, however, only provoked the very explosion she had dreaded. Her own reply to it was immediate. And instead of the promised submission, Michel found himself bombarded with reproaches and recriminations. Why must he refuse what she had asked? It was unreasonable; it was nothing but the same old story of his determination to show his power over her at every opportunity, without ever displaying the slightest consideration for her, thinking only of himself! Oh well, if he forbade her to go she wouldn't go, of course! And she heaped final coals of fire upon his head by reminding him of his own condemnation of some of the Saint-Guénolé set—and even as she denounced their heartlessness and malice it was plain enough that she regretted them—and reproached him sarcastically for paying any attention to the Raymond boys and all the others who had laughed at him and hated him and never let a chance go by of injuring him. They had seen that he was jealous, and had amused themselves by inventing all kinds of things to tell him simply to make him more jealous . . . and all because he had so openly despised them and because they were all furious, one as much as another, because she had never been more than a "good friend" to them and they had never been able to make her anything

else. She wasn't going; so why argue about it? She hated arguments. She wouldn't argue any more. He did not wish her to go. Very well.

Then, faced with the certainty of his discomfiture, she was overcome by an intense weariness of the spirit. August the first had come and still her mother had reached no decision. She had the feeling now that she was actually living certain pages of "The Conquest of Life." The empty shops, the drawn blinds, the oppressive heat, everyone else away on holiday—no detail was missing. Michel seemed to withdraw farther and farther away and almost to vanish from her life. Like Jeanne Rouves during the holidays before her marriage, she began to wonder if they would ever meet again. It seemed unlikely. Why tomorrow any more than today? There would scarcely be more opportunities in the future than there had been up to the present. Besides, his persistence in trying to make her break away from a past she regarded with pleasure and deliberately push her into an unknown and lonely future irritated her and affected her like a piece of blind infatuation, so that at times she was filled with a horrible desire to make him repent it. Such weariness afflicted her as she scarcely dared acknowledge even to herself, and unconsciously she set it down to his fault, obscurely hoping that perhaps some sudden caprice would make him cut the whole thing short and lose the chance she still offered.

Some days were neither more nor less than a pro-

longed crisis of despair, and she would feel utterly inert and languid, revolving the blackest thoughts. Rather than continue struggling and suffering thus she would have preferred to die. But, try as she might to ignore the inmost promptings of her heart, it was still to Michel that she turned to find the succour she despaired of.

"Why go on living?" she exclaimed. "Nothing matters to me any more. Your love? What you love is a dream of your own making. Reincarnate it in another, and that will be that. Is life anything but a dismal sort of joke? And love? Love too, perhaps. One swears that one will love for ever; one marries; and then the thousand little frictions of everyday life wear away the tenderest feelings more certainly than any tremendous crisis. Who knows whether after a year of married life we should not find ourselves quarrelling about the cooking? That would be stupid; but there it would be, alas! And millions of people have been like us, decoyed by hopes of everlasting love. Everlasting! What should we know of everlasting happiness, we who are limited and finite!

"My soul is nothing but chaos, and my finer feelings are somewhere at the bottom of it; so much at the bottom that I can't find them any more, nor you any more, alas! All the same, I think I still love you very much; only I don't know how to tell you. Be sorry for me. It's not my fault."

And she bemoaned herself:

"Take me in your arms, don't say anything, don't let's talk. Just let me hide my head against your heart and at last, at last, beneath your caresses, let the pent-up tears gently fall."

But even as the uneasy soul amidst the splendours of light, incapable of enjoyment, shrinks from the menace of imaginary shadows, so it seemed that in her very evocation of love she had found only a fresh cause for grief and doubt.

"Tell me," she went on, "do you really believe that our love will withstand the shocks of daily life together? Don't you think rather, that if love is to last for ever we must remain always apart—and that is as good as saying that love does not exist, and that it is a trap baited by nature for her own ends. That would be horrible.

"And yet, don't you see, it is precisely what I despair of ever finding that gives me an exact idea of the soul. There is a part of me which would like to love abstractly, purely, beyond time and space and duration. And yet for the other part of me, for my body, that isn't enough. Oh, if I really believed that this tenderness, this love which is our delight and our torment, if I believed it was all only a racial trap for the production of children, who will live all over again as we have lived, perhaps not even so well—then I should be so utterly revolted that I should never believe in anything again, neither in God nor in you. But in nothing, nothing at all!—That would be leading one by a path altogether too

idealistic towards a goal altogether too different from what was promised.

"Perhaps (I say 'perhaps' because I still want to hope), perhaps one always loves oneself. Perhaps you love yourself in me, and I, perhaps it is not you I love but only love itself."

Michel replied at great length. But the vigour which had once carried him over all obstacles was lacking now. He would not have admitted it to himself, but he too was feeling overcome with a sort of aridity now in place of that earlier careless spending of himself. When he thought of Catherine now he had to make an effort, and from day to day it was becoming more difficult to visualize her. By dint of so much evocation, moreover, it almost seemed as though her image had lost its clarity. Like a portrait which the very kisses of love have worn away, her image also faded, grew less distinct, and sometimes when he conjured it up he could scarcely recognize it and was seized with terror at the thought that soon it might vanish utterly.

In default of the present he turned to the past. It was memory here rather than his heart that supplied the details and, like a disillusioned man writing in cold blood the story of his love, he was no longer able to feel the emotions he described. It was to his memories of Royan, as to the very source of their love, that he returned most frequently. "Do you remember . . .?" And he would evoke the image of their houses, the seat

in the little garden, the evenings on the beach. . Working on this familiar canvas, the elaboration became too great now and it stood out from the rest of his letter almost like a separate essay.

One afternoon as he was writing thus in his room, the heat coming in through the half-opened window suddenly recalled to him with extraordinary clarity just such hot afternoons on the beach at Pontailac, when they had sat together in the shadow of the big red umbrella, gazing out at the glittering sea that shimmered in the heat. The impression was so vivid that he found complete happiness in lingering over the expression of it. At the end of one sentence he paused, pen in mid-air, hesitating for a word. And at this precise moment, as though it had been predetermined, the slight mental effort he was making suddenly made him realize that something had come between Catherine and himself. It was no longer her whom he was addressing; his mind was concerned wholly now with the turning of a phrase. He realized that something in him had changed, that he was beginning to forget her. And at the realization that time and absence were overcoming their love, that the means employed by their parents to separate them would end by being successful, a sudden surge of despairing courage swept through him. No matter if for a moment the goal was hidden from sight! If the difficulties of the ascent were such as wholly to absorb his attention, nevertheless he would continue to climb blindly, instinctively upwards.

He had known when he started out for what peak he was making: that was enough! He had only to go straight forward, since he was already on the path. Whatever the price of success might be he was ready to pay it all. His will should be stronger than life, should even be—if love failed—stronger than love itself.

In the first weeks of August, leaving Monsieur Varambaud behind in Paris, where his sittings would detain him for another fortnight, Madame Varambaud and her two children departed for Saint-Guénolé. She had taken again the house they had had last holidays: it stood almost opposite the house that had been Catherine's. Michel experienced no emotion on seeing it again. Catherine was not there, any more than she was in any of the other places that last year had been hallowed by their presence there together and were empty of her now. He could have remembered her all the time; he did not do so. He had suffered so much last summer, towards the end of his stay, through being so close to her and yet so separated from her, that it was almost a relief to be alone today. The weather was brilliantly fine. And he tasted all the pleasures of freedom in a place where he had once been so restricted, going and coming as he liked, going for walks or staying indoors, with nothing to fear and nothing to hope for. And all those whose mere presence had once exasperated him were now simply of no importance at all. He took them for what they were. He even, far from

avoiding them, sometimes sought the company of other boys of his own age to pass away the idle hours.

In the bosom of their families these might talk of examinations and careers, but when they were alone together they gave full vent to the complete vacuity of their minds in talk which suggested that the faculty of self-expression had been given them simply to allow them to air all the vileness of the human animal, reinforced by their own sordid minds and lives. Separated from the girls they usually consorted with, they would have been brought into contact with others who were staying there for the holidays, and they would interlard their conversations with names of various young girls, speaking of them with a shameless cynicism tempered by occasional scruples, as if they realized that, however they might regard them now as provisional amusements, in a very few years' time they would have to be choosing their wives from among them or their younger sisters. Some of them, particularly the younger ones, were engaged in intrigues which often went to considerable lengths and were only restrained by a fear of the consequences on either side; but the older ones rather held aloof from such adventures. Their conversation, too, was more decent, and they seemed anxious to make it plain that for them the time for that sort of thing was over. One of the oldest of them was even about to be married. Suspended between what he had been and what he was about to

become, he still clung to the past even as he made his preparations for the future, seeming undecided as to precisely what he was. Sometimes he displayed the gravity proper to a settled man, and then again some unconstrained witticism would reveal the old-time scamp. With what fatuous conceit, for instance, would he take leave of his friends to go to meet his fiancée, humming the chorus of some obscene song, the inanity of which was only equalled by his complacency in singing it. As a contrast, there was the Benjamin of the band, a sixteen-year-old boy whose family refused to allow him to go out after dinner. They shut him up: he promptly escaped. One evening Michel arrived just as he was emerging at a run from the hotel where he was staying with his parents; almost immediately his mother, a stout, highly-coloured little woman with pince-nez, appeared in pursuit, brandishing an umbrella and ordering him back. Visibly unable to make up his mind, and as afraid of running away now as of returning, he kept his distance in a sort of crab-like trot, his mouth twisted, one of his cheeks still red from the slap he had just received:—a pitiable spectacle that scarcely corresponded with his proud boast at other times that he had already had venereal disease, exalting it like a title to glory and offering to show the sceptical proof of his assertion.

There was another fellow about this time who had to keep to his bed for a similar reason. Michel went to see him sometimes. But this one was far from bragging

of his condition. Under the shock of the illness his soul showed itself for what it was, rudimentary, almost animal. And the big head, the little sunken eyes, the heavy, underhung jaw, the hairy fists lying on the counterpane, irresistibly called to mind a large, sick monkey. Apart from his brother-in-law and his own particular friends, who were in his confidence, he had told everybody that he was suffering from quite a different sort of illness, and family friends and acquaintances would call and enquire after him, or even pay him short visits in the hope of cheering him up. Advice was showered upon him, treatments suggested. A week later he made his reappearance on the beach, looking pale and ill and leaning on a cane; and Madame Varambaud, with that apparent good nature of hers that concealed the most perfect indifference, hailed him gaily and cordially asked how he was:

“Why Beaujard! How’s your rheumatism?”

Every hour had its appointed distraction—bathing, tennis, parties on the beach. In the evening, not without a sort of passive acquiescence on the part of parents, a good deal of fun was had at the expense of those who had gone home early to bed. Parties would be made up to go and discover windows whose shutters had carelessly been left half-open, and helping hands were ready to lift others up to get a better view. Respectable mothers of families were not above enjoying this sort of peepshow, for all their half-indulgent censure of this somewhat daring form of sport.

By now Catherine, ignorant of Michel's whereabouts owing to their roundabout manner of corresponding, had left Saint-Loup and gone to Le Touquet, that vast, melancholy stretch of Northern coast on the edge of which an artificial bathing-place has been created among the sand-dunes. The moment they arrived, while Madame de Laignes was still settling in, Catherine set off in the direction from which she seemed to hear the murmur of the sea. The road down which she hurried was perfectly straight and sandy, with occasional tall houses on either side; it appeared to end abruptly in space, but in that empty and illimitable vista she divined the sea. The sky was grey, the air chilly. At length, as she turned the corner of the last house, she saw outspread below her crumbling dunes and a vast and naked ocean; on either hand featureless coastline stretched away interminably, until it vanished in the greyish mists of the distance.

Dismayed, she sat down on the sand amidst the long, tough, sharp-edged grasses and gave herself up to despair. She felt lost and isolated, and half afraid of the place. So this was where she was to spend her holidays! What on earth could she do? Two months in this place, entirely alone! How different from other years! Even without Michel, even with grey and gloomy weather like this, how much better would Saint-Guénolé have been! However, it was not her fault, but Michel's. And the resentful thought of all the amusements she would have enjoyed there turned her against the author of

her banishment. With him she now lumped Madame Varambaud; for it was only because Madame Varambaud was determined to spend her own holidays at Saint-Guénolé—because she herself liked it and because she had plenty of friends there and had discovered all sorts of special conveniences: a drawing-master to teach Cécile for nothing, a carriage to take her to market, a family who allowed her and Cécile to use their piano as much as they liked—for all these reasons she had done her best to prevent Catherine's return to Saint-Guénolé, making it perfectly clear that the Varambauds could only go if Catherine was not going. And, come to that, with her usual adroitness she had exploited Michel's dislike of Saint-Guénolé and its inhabitants. A need to excuse him, though, made Catherine concede that, if he had been his mother's dupe, he had been it all unwittingly. And yet the excuse itself was double-edged: for he who had been so peremptory with her had himself been led by the nose by someone a little cleverer than himself. And the very excuse which had turned him into something of a dupe diminished her estimation of his strength and satisfied her resentment a little by lessening him in her eyes.

To overcome the appalling emptiness of her days she joined a circulating library, and the very first book she took out fell in strangely enough with her own state of mind. It was *Elle et Lui* by George Sand, the story of her love for de Musset.

Its romantic glitter took Catherine in completely,

although its unbridled sensuality, for all the author's excuses, gives really an impression less of passion than of an equivocal and almost dissolute pursuit of passion; but Catherine saw George Sand only as a great soul tortured by her longing for the ideal, who, meeting de Musset, believed for a moment that she had at last found the love of which she had dreamed. In the conflict of their two natures Catherine at once took sides with George Sand. She followed her step by step along a path she herself seemed to recognize: the first hesitation; the long struggles against her own feelings, as though moved by a presentiment of what was to come; the yielding; the rapid disillusionment. What a moment when they finally had to acknowledge that they had been mistaken! But how honestly she broke it to him, making him understand at last that they must part. And when, with fresh hopes, but hopes more fearful now for the recent disillusionment, she set about trying to reconstruct a new happiness on the ruins of the old, it was still she whom Catherine pitied, discovering within herself dormant emotions that allowed her, with strange facility, to feel with the author that he who was now discarded was less an enemy than a sick child who, if he cannot be loved, at least deserves to be pitied.

It was not until half-way through her second week that a letter came from Alice le Hombre, enclosing several from Michel. In the latest of them Michel told her how he and his father had had a talk together, in

the course of which his father had suggested that he might be deluding himself as to her feelings for him. And Michel had sworn that she herself should write to him. This he now asked her to do.

In her delight and surprise, not wanting even to give herself time for reflection for fear that if she did so her courage might ooze away, Catherine sat down and wrote as directed. Her letter to Monsieur Varambaud and her letter to Michel telling him she had done as he asked arrived by the same post. But, checked suddenly in the full flush of her excitement by the fear of proceeding too quickly, and almost as if frightened by the sight of the goal drawing nearer, she asked Monsieur Varambaud to exercise the greatest possible discretion with her mother, adding that any attempt to break the news to her yet would certainly prove premature. And she tried to induce Michel too to look at it from her point of view.

Now, she wrote, that he had succeeded in getting his own family to entertain the idea of their marriage, they must try and manœuvre her mother into a similar position. No need to break any windows, except as a last resort. Once her mother had definitely said no she would be most unlikely to go back on her decision. In fact, it might even be a good thing that their union could not in any case be immediate. And even as she confessed her weakness and timidity she begged him to believe in her and to leave her to act as she saw fit, adding that she could not bear to

think that their happiness might make others unhappy.

But once the letters were posted, her momentary energy flagged and she relapsed again into lassitude. The story of George Sand and de Musset haunted her. She imagined the happiness of those two great souls if only they could have truly understood one another; but they had not understood one another. And, her thoughts reverting to herself and Michel, she asked herself anguishedly what could befall this fusion of their two beings. What would be the element of discord? Sometimes she trembled in face of the unknown, sometimes she felt she could brave anything so long as she could fly to his gentleness, his tenderness, when she was too weary for more suffering.

In early August a lady of their acquaintance in Saint-Loup came to stay for a week at Le Touquet with her son and daughter. Catherine saw them arrive much as a shipwrecked mariner views the boat that lands on his desert shore. But the delight she felt soon turned to embarrassment; for the son, who was about Michel's age, suddenly started making love to her, love of the most charming kind, creating around her an atmosphere of admiration and flattery. And yet when he complimented her she could not manage to look disapproving; she laughed (she was so happy!), even at the risk of seeming to encourage him. And when he left there was suddenly a great emptiness in her life. She missed him; and, realizing how much, reproached herself as for a

fault committed against Michel, almost as for an infidelity.

Meanwhile her remorse was heightened by an unexpected attention from Michel himself, who, for the fifteenth of August, had sent her some sea-pinks in a letter, saying that he had been especially to get them for her, remembering how fond she was of them, from a lonely beach more than ten miles from Saint-Guénolé; and by way of expiation she humbly confessed to him what she insisted on calling her sin, begging him to forgive her, since she had repented.

But if the cause had vanished the effects lingered on. The weather had turned fine now, and the heat was suffocating. Alternately on edge and weighed down by a sort of torpor, Catherine had the feeling that only a storm could ease the tension of nerves strung to breaking-point. Certain memories of Michel seemed to calm her; others, far from doing that, had very much the contrary effect. It was humiliating and humbling to see in herself, or through herself, all the weaknesses of human nature exposed: such torturing thoughts passed through her like a wind, leaving her exhausted. Sometimes, in the depths of her boredom, she would tell herself again that it was all Michel's fault that she was there at all. If he had not insisted on over-ruling her she would have gone back to Saint-Guénolé. There at least, to mitigate her boredom, she would have had tennis, bicycling, music. Here she was alone, alone! Often now she spent whole afternoons drowsing on

her bed, and these were some of her happiest moments. But when she did not sleep there would come to her an infinity of little thoughts to dance a pattern in her head, and their thousand little pricks together made a wound. She thought of Michel; and suffered in thinking of him. Sometimes she reproached him—him, her dear love! And afterwards she would reproach herself for reproaching him. . . .

At such moments she seized on the tiniest marks of tenderness with joy. Often the merest nothing was enough to soothe her. Once, as she strove within herself in a veritable tempest of bitter, conflicting, and unbearable emotions, the way in which he pronounced her name came very clearly to her mind; and everything else was forgotten. She saw the movement of his lips, she heard his voice. Perhaps, she thought, he was calling to her down there among the rocks of Saint-Guénolé, at some spot perhaps where they had been happy together, and the sea, the same sea for them both, was carrying his voice to her.

And later, when she told him of this sweet hallucination, she wrote: "My name never seems so sweet as when you say it. For a moment every painful thought is put to flight. Oh, it is dreadful to suffer so, beloved! I begin to understand now something of what you must have been through. . . . Forgive me for not comforting you better. I simply didn't know."

The sentence that followed did not seem to refer to anything that had gone before, but rather to be the

outcome of a chain of thought of which only the conclusion appeared:

"I wonder what would have become of me if I had never met you?"

But a few days later, because Michel insisted that this sort of situation could not go on for ever and that he was going to write to her mother, she turned on him with such bitterness that it was hard to believe the same person was writing.

"I won't have you persisting in these ridiculous ideas after all I've said. It would be sheer stupidity to write to mother at this moment. I shall be the best judge of the right moment when it comes."

And then all the old maxims:

"What will be will be. And please don't let us try to hurry destiny, let's take life as it comes. Everything comes to him who waits. . . ."

She dissuaded him, moreover, from his project of coming to see her again secretly, expatiating at length and in detail on the insurmountable difficulties before him. Their house was in a very busy road; and the beach was enormous, endless, dismal, and without so much as a rock to hide behind. But she forgot to add that, to make up for this, there were pine woods immediately behind the town, where she strolled every day, entirely alone.

The morning post at Saint-Guénolé usually came about nine o'clock. Michel would often go and meet

the postman and ask casually if there was a letter for him; if there was, he would take it off to a quiet spot to read it. This particular letter he carried off to the little coastguard's hut. Catherine's reasons for refusing to let him come and see her filled him with a mounting distrust and almost with anger—when suddenly, and without warning, in the very next line, he read this:

"Last Sunday I might well have been drowned. The sea was rather rough and I had a sudden longing to go for a sail. There is a little sailing-boat on the beach that takes people out. I was with a friend of my sister's and we ran to catch it, but were too late: it put out just as we arrived. Only a quarter of an hour later it capsized and all six passengers were drowned. Up to now they have only recovered two bodies, two young girls who were washed ashore; they say they're hideous, disfigured, repulsive.

"It was horrible to think that if we had been only a few seconds earlier I should have been like that. I saw myself dead, an object of horror to everyone, lugged away by a couple of fishermen like a bundle of rags. And I imagined how dreadful you would have felt when you saw in the papers (for I'm pretty certain that no one here would have thought of telling you) that your love was dead. All the evening I saw the fishermen's lanterns from my window as they searched for the bodies, and I was so horrified and miserable: until it occurred to me at last that I escaped death like that

only because I am destined for you, destined to be of use down here below; and that has been my consolation."

For a moment his eyes continued to travel down the page without taking in what they saw. He was conscious of but a single thought: Catherine might have died. And it seemed to him that if such a calamity had happened in her present state of indecision he would have lost her twice over. Separated from him in death by all that he was trying to deliver her from in life, she would, dead, have belonged to her mother more completely even than she had in life. None of those ghastly details with which every generation wraps itself round, like a commonplace protective cloak for habit and convention, would have been missing. Disarmed as he was, he could have done nothing for her. They might even have forbidden him to see her. The whole worldly parade would have unrolled itself for the benefit of others over that poor, extinguished heart, that other bit of himself; one after another the costly horrors with which men please to aggravate the inevitable horrors of nature would have been enacted; and he must remain on one side, an impotent, distracted onlooker with no rights at all—he who had all rights.

But at the thought that he would have known nothing at all about it until he opened his paper a few days later he was filled with such an appalling sense of desolation, such a profound disturbance of the very roots of his being, that he realized he could never have survived it. For a moment, dizzily, he knew what

would be like to wish to die; but the feeling subsided, and he found himself taking an irrevocable decision: he would go to Le Touquet. . . . And at once the question of money arose. How was he to get it? He had already approached his father on the matter without making any attempt to conceal the fact that it was for the purpose of seeing Catherine again; and his father had refused him. But this time he simply must succeed; everything declared as much. He must have money; he would have it, then!

Intent on the problem, he was soon thinking of nothing else. But wherever he turned, however hard he sought to find a way out of the intolerable circle, he fell back time after time, baffled. But it almost seemed as though the very strength of his desire had affected Monsieur Varambaud, for suddenly—partly to be rid of the atmosphere of despondency with which Michel was poisoning their holiday, partly, perhaps, with a secret desire to further a project he preferred not to recognize officially—Monsieur Varambaud gave him permission to return to Paris, promising a small weekly sum for his keep.

Michel had decided not to warn Catherine of his arrival, for what would be the good of it? Nothing that he could write would be of any use. And her happiness would be all the more complete for being unexpected. How surprised she would be! For a fortnight, then, Catherine had no news of Michel at all, and with every post she wondered more anxiously what could have

happened. Sometimes, with melancholy jealousy, she told herself that he had probably forgotten her; had he not often spoken of a certain fair-haired girl, extolling her charm, comparing her to a pastel? The memory of her own lapse in that direction made her humbly admit the possibility of the same thing happening to him, but it was a hypocritical humility, concealing an insidious little hope that perhaps this would be the end of it all. She was beginning to think now, indeed, that he might break with her and that they might part, acknowledging their mistake. But it was no tragic parting with cries of hatred and bitterness that she imagined now; no, she felt, rather, only indulgence and forgiveness for him who had thus caused her so much suffering. All her life, moreover, she would be grateful to him for having revealed her true self to her. And she fell to dreaming (still under the influence of *Elle et Lui*) of a time when their love should be again what it once had been, a loyal and certain friendship, in the shelter of which they would muse with gentle melancholy on the memories of a great and shattered dream.

To avoid spending any money Michel went straight to his grandmother's at Thisy; then, only waiting for his second week's allowance to arrive to add to what he already had, he set off for Le Touquet.

When he got down from the train, though, which had carried him through the great pine woods from

Étaples to the terminus at Le Touquet, he began to realize the difficulties of his enterprise. There he stood, his scanty luggage in one hand, looking about him at this town sprung from the sand, somewhere in which was Catherine. But how to find her? Where to make for? He had always written to her through Alice le Hombre and did not, therefore, know her address. Ignorance had not stopped him from coming; but, instead of the village he had expected to find, here was quite a town, whose parallel streets and numerous imposing houses quite nonplussed him.

He decided to walk straight ahead, half fearing all the time that he might be too well served by fortune and run into her just when she was with her mother. But first he must find lodgings. Circumspectly he turned into the main street; but no hotel of sufficiently modest appearance could be seen. He turned off into the side streets and soon came across a little café with a card nailed to the door announcing a room to let with board at a moderate price.

On the very threshold he was greeted by the odour of *savon du nord*—that strong and characteristic smell of working-class houses, like the very emanation of their sad and neat interiors: it added to his sense of forlornness. And his latent distress was augmented by another, new to him—distress at penetrating into a poverty-stricken home and for a moment becoming a part of it.

On the first floor a woman with bared breast, one

child in her arms and others crying round her, led him across a little parlour to a room whose cleanliness reassured him. He settled on it at once; and, with a glance through the window, went out into the street again, free now to start his search.

Lunch was over; from every side people were beginning to make for the beach. He thought that perhaps he stood the best chance of meeting her down there. But his hopes fell when he beheld that vast stretch of sand with its little black dots of groups of holiday-makers far apart on its mile-long expanse. It had never occurred to him that the day might pass without his ever seeing her; he began to wonder now how many days it would take to find her. For a moment he bitterly regretted not having warned her of his arrival. He was quite sure he would succeed in the end, but all delay, in view of his scanty funds, would lessen correspondingly the number of days they would have together. It seemed, moreover, even more unbearable to be separated from her now that he was so near her than yesterday when he had been so far away. And at the thought of time passing by without his being able to arrest it, of the hours already lost, he was so overcome with a feeling of impotence that his despair caught his throat, and in his feverish over-excitement he could have wept.

He had thought it more prudent not to descend the sand dunes, at the foot of which a line of cabins

formed a sort of defensive rampart. But suddenly, with a sense of shock so violent that it absorbed all joy, dumbfounded by the sight of the impossible, there was Catherine herself only a few paces away. He shivered at the thought that he might be recognized by somebody else and, never taking his eyes off her, retreated some way away and lay down full length in the sand, supplicating he did not know what power to deliver her, and hanging upon her every movement with such intense concentration that everything else around him blurred and vanished.

Did something supernatural suddenly warn her of this presence? At any rate, she got up almost at once, and Michel watched her coming towards him, still with her sister. They passed quite close to him, unsuspecting, and turned into the road.

He followed them at a distance, adapting his pace to theirs.

At the first cross-roads they paused; the little girl turned off to the right, Catherine continued on her way alone.

With a few long strides he could have caught up with her now, but in spite of himself he felt his pace slackening. He continued to keep his distance, his heart pounding violently, his eyes fixed on her with a sort of avid surprise—sure of the moment which he knew must come, deliberately holding himself back to prolong anticipation for a moment.

He thought:

"I'll call out to her; she'll turn round. She'll be so happy. . .!"

Then he was suddenly afraid she might faint under the shock. For a moment or two this held him back. Finally he made up his mind, quickened his stride and, his throat quite dry, called to her without raising his voice:

"Catherine!"

She half stopped, turned her head; but instead of the delight he had expected her face showed only a troubled surprise.

He had thought she would rush to him; she let him come up to her.

"You!" she exclaimed. "How on earth did you get here? Are your parents here too?"

Overcome at seeing her again, not wanting to think now of the hurt she had already inflicted, his one idea was to get her away from this street full of people. But his own emotion, his fear of being caught, his anger at her slowness in following his lead, twisted his features into such an angry grimace that she could not guess what infatuated longing and love it concealed. She too was frightened, and fear paralysed all expression in her. Hastily, and visibly anxious to get away from him as quickly as possible, she explained that it was terribly dangerous to stay where they were, since she herself lived only in the next street; furthermore, she was expected home and must get back at once; but at the first possible moment she would come out again and

meet him at a spot she described, behind a certain sand-dune that could be seen between the pines just where the woods began.

Half an hour later she appeared. And for a moment the joy that had been so lacking before made them oblivious of everything else. They had so much to say that they did not know how to begin: words and ideas jostled each other like sheep trying to pass through a hurdle, sentences were begun and never finished. A year, almost a whole year since they had kissed! But with those same lips that assured him of her love Catherine now broke the spell that held them.

Once more she explained that they could not have more than a moment together: if she stayed any longer they would begin to worry about her absence. However, somewhere between five and six she would try and bicycle out to a cross-roads in the woods which she carefully described.

From the top of the dune, half hidden by trees, he watched her as she walked away. As she gained the road she turned round and waved once. And abruptly the landscape returned to normal: mere sand-dunes and stone houses. But still he lingered awhile, as though something of her presence yet remained about the place. He stood there motionless, vibrant with happiness, yet disappointed at its brevity; and, unable to sort out his conflicting emotions, prey to a sort of exasperated satisfaction.

He had nearly two hours yet to wait, but he set off

at once for the spot where they had agreed to meet, as though his early arrival would hasten her coming. Afterwards he remembered walking past enormous hotels with people drinking tea on the terraces, and down an endless esplanade bordered by tennis-courts; here were more people strolling about, young people in white flannels; and suddenly he found himself at the entrance to an almost deserted road at the end of which could be seen the cross-roads which was their rendezvous.

He was soon there, and from then on every minute seemed the one that was to bring her to him. They added themselves up, so crammed with expectancy and hope, and so alike in their uniformity, that, having no idea how long he had waited, he began to think it must be almost the time arranged, then that the time had come, then that it was past. Anxiety began to distract him. Where could Catherine be? What could she be doing? Why was she so late? Afraid that if he walked to meet her she might come by another way, he ventured a little way down the road, returned, started again. In his distress all the original force of his longing returned, and it seemed to him that they had not yet met and he was waiting for her for the first time.

Meanwhile the day declined and a cold little wind began sidling through the branches. Passers-by became rarer and hurried along now. Suddenly a brilliant beam of light swept the tops of the trees, vanished, reappeared. The lighthouse had been lit; the sun had gone

down. The sense of his threatened happiness crumbling a little more as every second passed shook him monstrously. Even if she did come now it would only be to say that she could not stay. And he decided that it was probably she who was to blame for a delay which a very little courage and ingenuity could have avoided. His disappointment was tinged now with a sort of hatred for her who voluntarily allied herself with the enemy and added her own blows to the blows of destiny.

Anxiety gave way to a sudden notion that he might have mistaken the rendezvous. He remembered passing another cross-roads. And at once, dry-lipped, he rushed off, running at full speed down the road which was already darkening between its bordering pines.

There was no one there. Perhaps at this very moment she was looking for him at the place he had just abandoned. He set off again, panting, despairing, almost weeping in the darkness. The cross-roads were empty. And in face of this solitude a deep despair overcame him. She had failed to come because she was afraid, because she was a coward; she had abandoned him. Hoping against all hope, he waited a little longer still. At last, worn out, distracted with misery and anxiety, he started heavily back towards the town.

The gas jets were lighted. He went in. A little lamp without a shade shed a crude and mournful light over the details of a room cluttered with ill-assorted oddments, and he sat down alone to his scanty meal, so

astonished to find himself where he was that he almost began to forget who he was.

As soon as he had finished he went out again. By a curious chance the house where he was lodging was at the corner of Catherine's road: not far away was the row of houses among which she had pointed out her own. But since they were all alike with their gables and wooden balconies it was impossible in the darkness to say which was hers.

Feeling safer in the dark he went closer, scrutinizing their dim fronts. From the ground-floor window of one a faint light filtered between heavy curtains. He had an intuition that this was the house. He could hear voices inside. He approached until he could distinguish them. That of Catherine's little sister suddenly broke out.

She was saying in a hoydenish, joking way:

"My heart is torn between the two!"

The unexpected phrase struck him with its relevance to the present situation. Catherine too was torn between him and her own people. To which side would she incline?

He listened anxiously to discover whether she too was sitting there at dinner. If she were there it would at least mean that nothing unusual had happened to her. The murmur of voices still came confusedly to him, mingled with all kinds of familiar, peaceful sounds, the clatter of plates, the clinking of glasses. A burst of laughter suddenly made him start and tingle. She was there. Nothing had happened to her, then. She

simply had not wanted to meet him; that was all. She was dining as usual, gaily, without a thought for him, without so much as wondering where he was.

But to know her so close and not even be able to see her was so maddening that his eyes filled with tears. And, incapable of tearing his gaze from that gleam of light which seemed to bring her within reach and yet render her still more unattainable, he drew off a little and went and lay down full length in the sand, still watching that crack of light in the indeterminate landscape.

The sea-wind whispered. The darkness was absolute. He felt forsaken, lost, like a rag fluttering in the road, like an animal dying outside a door, like a homeless beggar without a stick in the world. So profound was his sadness that it seemed almost like something detached from himself, leaving him with heart and mind emptied and limbs fatigued. He got up at length, as completely divided from her still by that little strip of curtain as he might have been by the sea itself whose roar he heard behind him in the darkness. Mechanically he went back to his temporary bed in the wretched little room that smelt of soap.

EARLY NEXT MORNING, so that he would not miss Catherine if she was going out, he was in ambush at his window. But, apart from a maid who came out with a basket to go shopping, he saw no one; and for more than an hour there was no sign of life.

The hope which returning day had brought began to give way to fresh despair when he suddenly had an idea; perhaps Catherine in her impatience had already gone out to meet him and was waiting on the beach! He ran off at top speed. The umbrella was already set up, but there was no one there. Wouldn't she be more likely, though, to be at their last night's rendezvous on the edge of the pine-woods? But she was not there. Revolving endless conjectures, the most unpleasant of which was the most persistent—namely, that she had found some excuse and gone away altogether—he returned to keep watch on the immediate neighbourhood of the house.

During his absence somebody had flung open the shutters, and the french windows on the ground-floor were ajar. He hoped for a glimpse of her as he passed, perhaps for a sign; or he might even overhear a few

words or a fragment of conversation which would tell him something.

With studied casualness he walked on; and he had just passed the house when he saw advancing towards him, corpulent and commanding, Madame de Laignes herself. In a moment they would meet. His legs turned to water, but he managed to walk on. If he turned tail now it would only attract her attention to himself. The road was lined on either side with houses; impossible to slip away down a side-street. A single chance of salvation remained. He must make this perilous passage without being recognized. There was only one thing to do, and that was to try and look as different as possible and render himself unrecognizable. So he frowned fiercely, twisted his mouth awry, closed one eye and opened the other wide.

Without the slightest hesitation or sign of recognition on her face Madame de Laignes passed by. But her eyes had rested upon him for a moment and he felt that she had taken stock of him. Could she have recognized him?

All the morning this doubt tormented him. And, in addition to this, he was worrying over what could have happened to Catherine and why she had not come out. After his lunch he had just decided to go out himself when his landlady knocked on the door and held out a letter to him. His heart contracted, and he repressed a shiver of apprehension. Who could be writing to him here? What could they want of him?

Catherine's handwriting surprised and reassured him. He tore open the envelope: what he had dreaded had come to pass.

Without regarding the incident, it seemed to him, as anything worse than an unfortunate accident, Catherine humorously related how, during lunch, her mother had announced that she had just met Michel and how ("of course she's exaggerating," Catherine commented), not content with cutting her dead, he had made a horrible face at her with the obvious intention of being rude. However, the harm was done; the thing now was to repair it as best as they could: but really he had only himself to blame; why had he disobeyed her and walked past the house so recklessly, and why hadn't he waited for her yesterday? She had gone to the appointed place—a little late, but still. . . . And when she had failed to find him there she had quartered the wood in every direction, searching for him. She asked him now the question he had so long been asking himself: what had happened?

She finished up by declaring that it would be more difficult than ever for them to meet now. And she advised him to stay in hiding for a couple of days, after having ostentatiously sent her a note of farewell, the text of which she provided:

"My Catherine, I have seen you. For a whole year I had not seen you. Now I am happy. I go."

"That won't look at all odd coming from you, darling idiot!"

Then on the third day, at nine in the evening, he must make his way into their house by the back. And then at last they would really meet. If he loved her he would obey. Two days' prudence and then long hours in her arms: that or nothing? He must choose!

The girl who had brought the letter, Catherine's chambermaid, whom she had taken into her confidence, stood waiting for his reply. He sat down at once to write it. But this proposal that he should enter her house at night, especially when all she need do was to slip outside to meet him, seemed to him both silly and dangerous. How indeed was he to get into a narrow house with all the rooms piled on top of each other and no possible means of escape? . . . He demonstrated the difficulties of such an enterprise, and insisted on a further meeting.

An hour later—he had waited in his room, overcome by a sort of mortal idleness—the chambermaid returned with a second letter. But the tone was different this time, unexpectedly tragic after the liveliness of her previous note. She started by describing the absolutely sleepless night she had spent, which had left her broken and exhausted—the consequence, doubtless, of her worry at not finding him last night, and of her long, dark walk, and also of her emotion and astonishment at seeing him yesterday. This morning when she tried to get up she had all but fainted. . . . The preamble concluded, she started unfolding her revised plans—perhaps she regarded this account of her present state

of health as sufficient excuse for ignoring his demand for a meeting.

At first, she wrote, she had entertained the wildest plans, such as flying with him that very morning, but she had calmed down now and here was her suggestion.

First he must call on her mother and explain with a great show of frankness that as he was just about to leave for England, where he might stay a long time, and as he happened to be passing so near the de Laignes, he had come to ask permission to call on Catherine, whom he had not seen for a year, to talk to her about his future and ask her advice.

"You know," he was to say, "what Catherine in her kindness has been able to make of me; you know how wise and good she is and what an incomparable friend I have always found in her. It is she who has so far guided me and it is she who has made me what I am. I assure you I am worthy of her, and I do really need her advice. I have invariably found it so valuable. I beg you, do not refuse this request. My whole future may depend upon it."

In her own character, Catherine added:

"If you do see her, don't say anything about our real plans."

In the midst of his very real emotions this proposition rang hopelessly false. What purpose could be served by so extravagant a lie, such elaborately fabricated deceit, when in a very little while it was bound to be

discovered and held against him? He had the feeling that, without her realizing it, her plans were so calculated as to force him to say the word he was determined not to say. Without repulsing him, with every appearance, on the contrary, of doing her best to meet him, she was taking refuge in the impossible. In a flash all the danger of the present situation became clear to him, and he realized that the moment for action had come. To escape from it it was necessary to make a clean break, and to do so now would be to gain time and spare themselves much suffering: the very next morning Catherine must elope with him. An hour's effort, a month's acute discomfort, and all would be well. He counted the money he had left. If Catherine had as much the plan would be feasible. They would catch the morning train and arrive the same evening at Thisy. That would be the ticklish part of the programme. He saw himself ringing at his grandmother's door, and imagined her amazement when she recognized Catherine. It would be too late, though, for her to refuse to take her in. He himself would return to Paris. There would be a tremendous scandal, and a very simple outcome: marriage. His father would give him the allowance he had promised, two or three thousand francs; Madame de Laignes could hardly refuse to give less. They would be poor, but they would not starve.

He stated his resolve in categorical terms; Catherine replied immediately. But since the morning her health

had taken a turn for the worse. She had fainted again, right off this time. She began by telling him this, and then went straight to the heart of the question.

As she had already told him, she had had precisely the same idea herself. For a moment even she had been quite determined to run away with him. But a simple calculation had brought her to her senses. They would have 65 francs between them. After taking their tickets they would have about 12 francs left.

"So you see," she concluded, "it can't be done."

But she had thought up another plan, in case the one she had suggested in the morning wasn't acceptable. And this was for him to go and stay at the hotel adjoining their house and take a top-floor room, so that he could climb out on to the roof at night and so down into her room, returning by the same way. It would only mean crawling about twenty-five yards along the gutter.

In face of such a suggestion, which exceeded in extravagance her original plan, his old suspicions returned with redoubled intensity—that she was trying to involve them both in a fantasy which should lead them farther and farther from reality, and from which he must cut loose.

If she really wanted to see him why was she shutting herself up like this at home? Even if she wasn't very well, surely she hadn't become so ill in these few hours that she couldn't go out at all? In any case, she was far less likely to come to any harm taking a short bicycle-ride than he was crawling twenty-five yards

along a roof in pitch-black darkness! However, since she was offering him a chance of seeing her, he did not want to have to reproach himself with running away from it. Besides, it would be to take a leaf out of her own book and lay himself open to the charges he was always bringing against her.

Bracing himself, therefore, he went then and there to have a look at things. As he had thought, the roofs in front were sheer. Perhaps they were different at the back? But the back was partly hidden by the flanking buildings. The enterprise, however, must be possible, or she would never have suggested it.

He returned to his room to think it over and inure himself to the idea. Nothing easier than taking a room in a hotel: but a room under the roof, one particular room and no other? How was he to explain such peculiar exigence? He hunted for a reason that might pass muster. But he was so intent on the goal that he could think of nothing but that goal. What was it he wanted to do? Reach Catherine at night by crawling along a roof. . . . All right, he would give that as his explanation when he went to book his room. But if they simply showed him the door, if they were rude or laughed at him? They might even tell Madame de Laignes! Oh, the adventures Catherine pushed him into! The ridiculous things he had to do to achieve so simple a thing—to marry the woman he loved! However, he would go through with it now; he had quite made up his mind.

At the thought of the coming scene he was almost paralysed by helpless embarrassment. To cover it up as best he could he essayed an attitude far removed from his actual feelings, and sallied forth, a cigar between his teeth, his hat cocked over one eye, and nervously grasping his cane, in the direction of the hotel.

He went in; a woman who was sitting in the office, sewing, got up and came towards him.

Still keeping his cigar between his teeth he asked: "Can you let me have a room?"

She assented. Then, adopting the sort of bantering tone Lavarenne might have employed in similar circumstances, he went on (although he could have wept with regret, despair and helplessness):

"But it must be a top-floor room, facing towards the pine-woods."

The critical moment had arrived.

"I'd better tell you that I have a friend who is staying next door. Her mother won't allow her out. If the roof is practicable, though, I intend to use it tonight to get from my room to hers."

There was a moment's silence. The woman was plainly taken aback. She answered at length, surprised into acquiescence (so powerful is the impress of a mind exclusively bent on one subject):

"The roof is very steep, though. . . ."

A maid came up, followed by a waiter. The woman explained the situation to them.

Michel was obliged to listen to his own explanation

all over again; in the mouth of another it seemed more improbable than ever. Nevertheless, his voice was clear and assured as he cut short the conclave that had sprung up between the proprietress and her two employees.

The waiter was wagging his head and declaring that the scheme was unfeasible; Michel said determinedly:

“Anyway, show me the room!”

The proprietress now decided to call the chambermaid, and there was another short wait while she came down. Then he was handed a key; and as he climbed the four flights of stairs behind the girl Michel seemed to feel the volume of astonishment and comment gathering behind him at the bottom of the stairs, to break over him when he should return, as he would have to do almost at once.

The attic to which he was conducted had a skylight.

With the air of one perfectly accustomed to this sort of thing he told the girl to open it—she was beginning to take quite an interest in the enterprise—and then put his head through the opening.

Close before him rose up the green tops of trees. But without a glance at them he looked up at the roof, an almost vertical roof, difficult to scale even with a ladder.

“No good, I’m afraid; the roof’s too steep. Thank you all the same.”

And leaving his escort to close the door he went quickly downstairs again, and going up to the little group standing there waiting for him repeated what he

had already said upstairs, and, still with that cigar between his teeth, still grasping his cane, departed as he had come, bravely essaying to look like a man out for a pleasant stroll, but horribly aware of the remarks being exchanged behind him, which seemed to bore into the back of his neck, and only with difficulty refraining from breaking into a run.

He went up to his own room and flung himself down on the bed. No longer the dashing adventurer, the bold seducer whom nothing on earth could stop. . . . He wept, his head between his hands, his elbows deep in the white cotton counterpane. What had just happened seemed like a symbol. For to place the goal beyond reach, as she invariably did, was surely the best way of preventing their ever attaining it? In justification of her refusal to elope with him she had written: "Our love is something rare and delicate, a kind of hot-house flower; it must never be exposed to the worries and cares of everyday existence." What was this ideal she was for ever invoking, to which she was for ever sacrificing the present moment? She would never attempt to realize it for fear of compromising it, and her fear of disappointment made her reject every chance of attaining it. Like the astrologer in the fable, she had looked too long at the skies and would end by tripping and falling; her infatuated dream would be the cause of her downfall. If nothing intervened she was lost. To run away with him then and there would not be madness but rather the sheerest common sense. A

little out of the ordinary, perhaps, but on the other hand it was an ordinary enough thing for a girl to betray her lover by marrying another, and yet such treachery could hardly be justified or excused by its very commonplaceness!

Besides, out of the ordinary though it might be, such a decision would not have any really serious consequences. Madame de Laignes might not love her daughter very much and she might love her very unwisely; but love her she did, and she would never cast her off completely. What objection could be made to their marriage? The difference in their ages? His lack of any position? Properly regarded, such obstacles were purely conventional and of no real importance. Injuries to the soul, on the contrary, are real, painful, slow to heal. She wanted love to bring them only happiness: did she never think of the harm she was doing him and of the fact that a single word from her could end it all? He was suddenly convinced that the reason for her refusal was simply that she had never yet understood what he had been trying to make her understand; and he realized that on him success depended.

Without waiting a moment longer—his eyes dry now—he began to write to her: with such a longing to convince, and with such an outpouring of passion and of faith, that his very soul seemed to speak in the threadbare phrases, and, if man could but perceive the signs of the Spirit, his hand had left more than ink upon the paper.

He even made use of her inertia and turned it to account by telling her she must not think at all, since she was so fearful; she need not think of anything. Tomorrow—he specified the exact time—she would get up. She would dress, put on her hat and coat, go downstairs, open the front door. . . . And, as he watched the future thus unroll before him, he did with her, through her, movement by movement, all she had to do. He buttoned up her coat, he guided her hand to the door-handle and her feet in the direction they must take; leaving no movement to her own initiative, word by word he taught her her part: she would only have to repeat it after him. She was to make for the Étaples road. He would be waiting for her there. And there he would take her in his arms, and on the grassy verge they would take their first steps together and in freedom. At the station in the woods they would catch the tram: a month later they would be married! What an outcome for one so simple action! What annihilation of all threats and fears!

The long waiting to which they were condemned seemed frightful to him: but in her reply Catherine, on the contrary, upheld it as the proper prelude to a union that was to last all their lives, "and our lives," she said, "we must not imperil with experiments." She cited the example of a girl she had known at Saint-Loup who had eloped with a young man, only to return at the end of a week for lack of money.

He persisted. But the short note which was returned

almost at once contained this time a categorical refusal. No exaltation now. . . . And, as if she could be cool and collected enough precisely when it was of no use, she did not waste time now in futile digressions. The conditions she laid down were tabulated. She would marry him: (1) when their future was assured; (2) when it was perfectly clear that her mother would never consent to their marriage; (3) when Monsieur Varambaud had made it plain that for his part he did not object; (4) when Michel himself had finally decided that he still wanted to marry her. There could be no question of experiment for them. Their engagement must be irrevocable. There must be no question of her having to return to her mother after a week or two for any reason whatsoever. . . .

As it was nearly dinner-time the maid had not waited for an answer: all means of communication was thus cut off until next day. What a dreadful evening was in store for him! After his meal he went out. But rather than approach Catherine's house, that house which was at once her prison and her refuge from him, he wandered along the dunes, gazing out over the emptiness of that vast and endless stretch of beach, whose silence was deepened by the far-off murmur of the sea. He turned back and went home and to bed. When he had blown out his candle the room was still faintly illumined by the gas-light shining in through the open shutters from the street lamp fixed to the corner of the house.

Nothing happened next day until three o'clock in the afternoon. Just as he was beginning to wonder if he would not have to leave without seeing Catherine again, or knowing anything more, a very bustling maid appeared: Madame de Laignes had gone out with her younger daughter, and Mademoiselle had sent her to tell him to come round at once.

It seemed a pointless bit of foolishness, but he could not let such an unexpected opportunity go, and he ran downstairs without even stopping for his hat and followed his guide at a trot across the short space between the two houses.

A quick glance round assured him that the road was empty, and he cleared the veranda steps in one leap, darted across a dining-room and was on his way upstairs. On the second floor a door stood open: Catherine's. She was waiting for him, sitting on her bed, sparkling with happiness, arms outstretched to him. He threw himself into her arms. But even such a moment as this was spoiled by what had come between them—not so much exterior obstacles as the antagonism of one heart—the heart that now beat beneath his own. Had she even really tried to meet him the day before? He still doubted it. He questioned her closely; she seemed to reply sincerely enough. But she lied with such facility, and with a self-deception that enabled her to be perfectly sincere in her lies, that, although he felt she was sincere now, he had no idea whether she was telling the truth or not. And all the while his

terror of suddenly hearing Madame de Laignes' voice, or her step on the stairs, impelled him to curtail his own delight. Once more, and for the last time, he strained her to him; then, in a flash, he was out of the room, one glance back to impress her image on his memory, and in a flash he was downstairs, four steps at a time, dazed with happiness and still feeling that soft breast pressed against his heart.

But after this taste of living reality life was like a dead void, and he realized more clearly than ever how impossible it would be to go on waiting, perhaps for years. To wait and wait. . . . The obstacles set up against them were precisely of the kind that are best served by time, and surely to ask for time, as Catherine asked, was to play into the hands of their deadliest enemy? It behoved them, on the contrary, and without a moment's delay, to vanquish time, to struggle against it, as a swimmer resists the strong set of a current, and, instead of being swept away by its slow, inexorable motion, to attain at one stroke the goal on which their eyes were set. The whole burden of the struggle was his, however; she would not raise a finger to help him. She had sworn to follow him as soon as he should give the word, and now she had abandoned him. Nothing, neither arguments nor prayers, nor imminent danger nor hope of happiness to come, could rouse her from her inertia.

And at the thought that their fate depended now solely upon her, that all obstacles to their happiness

could be set aside by nothing more powerful than the faint stir of air produced by the utterance of one single syllable—at the thought of all this, his suppressed emotion overflowed in the form of anger, and in his anguish he wrote bitterly to Catherine.

Her wounded self-esteem retorted with no less bitterness. But almost immediately, satisfied with her retort, she turned the opening he had given her to her own account.

What had just passed between them, she said, only confirmed her in her resolution. They were not yet fit for life together. It was enough to see how easily he swung from perfect happiness to senseless anger. Then, illogically enough after this avowal of her doubts, she proceeded to lay bare her heart in the most unexpected and tender way, justifying her behaviour and basing her refusal wholly on her love for him.

“I wish I could make you understand the tenderness that underlies my refusal. For the moment you hate me: but oh, try and understand that I am not repulsing you, that I love you and shall always love you; that I am yours. You know it really. You know that all my life is yours, that I withhold it from you today only because it would be of no good to you, no help to you. You must have felt how utterly happy I was this afternoon when I clasped you in my arms? Oh, don’t despise the love I offer you, a pure and whole-hearted love; it is the very best of me!”

And then, as if determined to be calmer, she returned

once more to the conditions she had lain down for their marriage, gently reproaching him for arguing like a child (it hurt her to have to say it) when she wanted to see him arguing like a man. When the day came she would inform her mother, since she was anxious not to deceive anyone any more, neither him nor anyone else: she would openly pack her dresses, her linen, all that she might require for a journey, and set out to join him.

"That is my plan. I have thought about it for a long time."

But this new project, instead of opening new vistas before him, as she had imagined, only threw a revealing light upon herself. Reality for her would never be more than a spring-board from which she precipitated herself into fantasy. Who loves more truly, he wondered, she who mingles such reservations with her passion, or the sentimental little work-girl who tells her mother she is on night-shift so that she can be with the man whom, at any rate for a moment, she believes she loves?

For the third time night came round. He sat down to his supper. His landlady moved about the room. She spoke to him; he answered. At last, after placing a little plate of fruit before him, she left him to himself. Never had solitude seemed so frightful. In his misery he could only endure from moment to moment, and all around seemed only a dark and friendless void. He remembered the girl who had dried de Musset's tears

in a cabaret one night. And he envied the repose that weary head had found upon an unknown shoulder: in his distress he found himself suddenly overflowing with gratitude towards her who had shown pity, as though it were himself she had comforted.

He fell asleep. And just as once in childhood the grief night had soothed returned unabated with the morning, so now he found himself opening his eyes on those same gloomy shapes gathered round to await his wakening: they sprang at him all together and took up their stations in his aching brain.

What could he do? He did not know. His effort to convince her had been such that it could not be repeated. He was at the end of his strength, exhausted. His arguments seemed no longer to have any life. He racked his brain to find something else to say, some other way of expressing what he had already said, something that should be, as it were, outside himself. And all at once the idea came to him of declaring that he would kill himself if she would not elope with him. That should prove decisively whether she really loved him, as she said she did, more than anything else in the world.

Barely a quarter of an hour after she had left with the tragic missive the maid was back again, agitated and out of breath, but barely concealing behind the mask of alarm she felt it incumbent upon her to assume a curiosity as deep as it was unsatisfied and a keen pleasure at having a part in an in-

trigue that was rapidly becoming more and more interesting.

Still panting, she began by explaining that she had run all the way (and she had been obliged to knock her milk-jug over in order to get an excuse for getting out at all) because Mademoiselle was really ill now with a fit of weeping and choking which prevented her from replying at once as Monsieur had asked, but when she was better she would reply, and meanwhile could she have just one little word, now, at once?

The cruelty of the test he was putting her to was now brought home to him; but he replied in deliberately ambiguous phrases, unwilling to spoil the effect he had created, yet willing to soften it a little and soothe an anxiety he did not intend wholly to remove.

It was not until after lunch that the maid was able to return. This time Catherine did not lie. Like the spring gushing forth from the lightning-riven rock she poured out her heart's feeling unreservedly. Her very handwriting, ragged and sloping, was like an old woman's tottering, trembling hand.

She confessed that her distress had been so unbearable that for a time she had thought she loved him no longer, exclaiming: "My God, why did I ever meet him?" It was for that reason, for fear of coming to hate him in such moments of acute crisis, that she demanded a respite, only a short respite. . . . and to this end she clutched at random at any straw that looked as though it might support her: she was going to try to make

herself independent by working: she could make dresses, hats. . . .

"And then, I promise, I'll be brave and strong. I'll come to you without regrets, to you, my life, my light, my strength. I love you. Can you hear all the tenderness with which I say that? I suffer intolerably, I am feverish, I shiver; I thought once I was going mad. . . . But my soul is at peace now; it has found you again.

"If I do not come with you today it is because I should still have regrets, and if I am to be yours I must be completely delivered from myself. There is only one thing for us to gain by waiting further, and that is my own moral freedom, which I shall do my best to win. Isn't that so? Don't talk of death! Oh, when I thought of you a little while back, stretched lifeless on the ground, all for my sake, a bullet-hole in your forehead, blood over the eyes that I adore, I thought I should go mad; and yet all the time I told myself no—no, I must not go to him yet. Fate will have not it so. Oh God, how ill I feel! But I love you, I love you; oh, be kind to me, have pity on me!"

The compassion he had asked for himself he felt now for her. But in accepting what she had, and in accepting still the risk of his death, was there not something almost like contempt? He would ask no more of her now, however; all energy had gone, and all anger. He would go. And he was so wretched that he even forgot to pity himself.

Her letter of farewell was simply a repetition of her

previous one, but calmer. She asked again for a breathing-space so that she could make herself free, swearing that she was firmly resolved to shake off the thousand ties that still bound her to her present mode of life. And she implored him, besought him, to forgive her weakness. Of course, she was perfectly capable of dressing and going to meet him—but she could not do it. She did not want to risk a single regret after a rupture with the past that must be final.

“Don’t leave me alone all my life,” she concluded. “It is only for a month or two that I am leaving you. Those few months shall be employed in perfecting myself. Help me, far apart as we are, and I shall do it: leave me to myself and I shall be sucked back again; don’t abandon me now, beloved, in your turn!”

He returned next morning to Thisy. He walked alone down the road he had hoped to take with her. He arrived alone at the tramway station where they should both have waited; farther off he could see the cross-roads to which she had never come. The tram issued from the pine-woods. From the platform of the tram he watched the green line of trees recede towards the horizon. Somebody jostled him. When he looked again it had gone; already it was a memory—but a memory so strong, peopled by ghosts so insistent, that he felt that in years to come he need only turn his mind back to this period to see them all vividly again and to be able to reconstruct, minute by minute, in spite of the lapse of time, the hours which had given them birth.

He found himself back at Thisy again, and mechanically set about the business of living—without hope, without object. What indeed could he say to Catherine that he had not already said? What could he do for her that he had not already done? The last hope—and against all reason he clung to it—dwelt in her. Was she perhaps considering? Was she perhaps deciding? The letter he expected came next day. Catherine asked his forgiveness, adding that in her heart of hearts, nevertheless, she was sure she had done the right thing.

Once more he offered to come and fetch her, if she was afraid of leaving by herself; and even as he made the suggestion he smiled bitterly to himself. But though he knew well enough what her reply would be he still continued to hope. Every time the door-bell rang it came as a shock and he half expected to hear Catherine's voice. Every time he went to the gate he would hardly have been surprised to see her walking towards him up the avenue. Once the bell rang and Madame Armelle appeared waving on high a blue envelope and calling noisily to him: he felt sure the telegram must contain unexpected good news.

Without visible emotion he opened it before a very intrigued Madame Armelle. These were the words he read:

"Mademoiselle travelling. Letter follows tomorrow."

The signature was that of Catherine's maid.

"Not bad news, I hope?" enquired Madame Armelle in a tone of nicely balanced interest and curiosity.

Michel said "No," shortly, and thrust the telegram into his pocket. But this was intolerable! For fear of his going to fetch her, to cut short any such temptation to her to yield, she had simply fled. And in the care she had taken to have the telegram sent by a third person he saw, ominously, an obvious intention of introducing a strange element between them.

The promised letter arrived next day by the two o'clock post. What did it say? What fresh trouble was it bringing him?

He went off alone to the lime walk to read it. It was like a blow on the naked heart.

"Dear Friend,

"In an hour's time I shall have left here. I have just received your letter. I can only congratulate myself more than ever on not having obeyed you. You don't love me as much as you did, you say; I had already realized that I do not love you enough. This incredible crisis of ours should have made me brave and strong. Instead, I have shrunk to the point where my only desire is to return to the passive serenity of earlier days. For a moment I believed it would be possible to break away from it all. I tried, but I was powerless to move what life had piled up before me and upon me. I can't do it—or I can no longer do it: one is as sad as the other.

"Perhaps with your help I might have succeeded in time. You did help me, once, and that makes your

repulse the worse: my fall is greater because you wanted to exalt me to your own height.

“You speak of life together, of a brave and intelligent life, of a splendour that shall dazzle us? Such things are for you, but not for me: I am not worthy either of understanding or of sharing in them.

“I have suffered horribly, but now I suffer no more; I feel limp and weak. I remember, when I saw you the other day, how I was overcome with an almost divine happiness. My heart was so strained in expectation of you that it was without surprise, almost as the most natural thing in the world, that I felt you beside me. I thought I should die of joy when you came to me, when I kissed you, when I heard your voice saying ‘I love you.’ But that is all over; I have no longer the strength to resist, or suffer, or rejoice. I do not want you with me; it would not be painful for me to see you, but neither would it give me any pleasure. If you were to die I should experience a physical sensation of extreme distress, but it would not break my heart. I am indifferent, and that is worse than the worst pain, for it shows that my heart is dead, and it is you who have killed it. Have no remorse, though. What you attempted had greatness in it. If I were still capable of any sort of feeling I even think I should be grateful to you; for the attempt was worthy of you, but I, I was unworthy of it.

“Mother knows why I want to go away for a while. She hasn’t said a word, but she understands the sort

of deadlock I've reached. It has been generous of her not to add to my unhappiness by scoldings and reproaches. If I were not as indifferent towards her as I am towards you I should be grateful to her.

"It is quite useless to write to me and say the same things all over again: I shall not reply.

"I have just read your letter again. You are unhappy; and I almost envy you, for I can no longer feel unhappiness. Certainly it has been a splendid dream, but my soul has proved too small to grasp it. I am aware of your pain without sharing it, and I tell myself that it is not in me to make you happy. As for dying, certainly you will not die! There's a future before you, perhaps a glorious future. And I, from the humble corner which will be mine, I shall feel, if my mind is not as dead as my soul, something very like joy when that day comes.

"I know all this will make you unhappy (but how lucky you are to be able to feel at all!). But that will soon pass, I hope. I have, when all is said, loved you well. Today I have no regrets and no remorse; I have no desires. But I should like you to be happy if you can. What is left of my life breathes out this last, last wish. The last—I write that word and am not even sad.

"Good-bye, Michel; this is the end."

From the kitchen where she was supervising the preparation of dinner, Madame Armelle from time to time cast an appraising eye in Michel's direction.

Something was up, plainly; but what? He had been to see Catherine again, she was sure. But what had the result of the journey been? Nothing to write home about, to judge from his expression now!

He was pacing up and down with bent head, the letter still in his hand. She could see that he was weeping. At length he brushed away his tears, and a few moments later turned back to the house.

He went out on to the veranda, took pen and ink, and started writing. Without pausing he covered four sheets with close writing; his letter finished, he left it lying on the table and went out again into the garden.

Madame Armelle at once remembered that it was tea-time. Swiftly she opened the little glazed door on to the veranda and went over to the table to clear it. Had Michel been there she would have asked him to put his letter away. But he was not there. With the greatest circumspection she picked it up and put it on the shelf of the little bureau, making sure that it should be neither creased nor crumpled and that when he found it in another place it should be exactly as he had left it: discreetly, holding it at arm's length, and in her excessive delicacy quite forgetting that she was long-sighted. Thus it was quite by accident that her eyes lit on the first line of the last page, but what she saw was so interesting that unconsciously she went on and read to the end.

"You speak of the future, of glory; I care for no future in which you have no part, and my only glory

is that I love you. I have not the least ambition save to become more to you day by day. You fly from me, I desire only you; you make me suffer, I love you; you cast me off, I love you still. And though it is bitter to feel one must realize one's dream alone and that, for all one's tremendous efforts, the being one loves best in the world, the being who is almost one's own creation, so to speak, understands one so little that she falls back upon her worst enemies—in spite of all this, one day you will see your whole life laid bare before you in a book, although you won't know it's yours, and you will despise what you still are. Our quarrel, you see, only proves that, loving you too much, I believed you had a soul; but your soul is not yet born. Doubtless you do not feel yourself to blame now, and you torture me perhaps unknowingly. Your punishment will come later, when we are married, and you re-read these letters and look back upon your life. Only then will you understand all the wrong you have done me."



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